In loving memory of my grandmother, Sanda

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTE ON THE USE OF PLACE NAMES

Throughout the present book I opted for the place names which were in use at the time of the events narrated. Where variations exist, these have been mentioned in the text. Below is a list of place names most frequently referred to in the book together with their national variations:

Krassó-Szörény/ Caraş-Severin
Karánsebes /Caransebeş
Maros/Mureş
Orsova/ Orşova/ Orsowa
Temesvár/Timişoara
Tisza/Tisa
Szörény/Severin
Weißkirchen/Bela Crkva/Biserica Albă
Újvidék/Novisad/Neusatz
Zrenjanin/ Großbetschkerek/ Nagybecskerek

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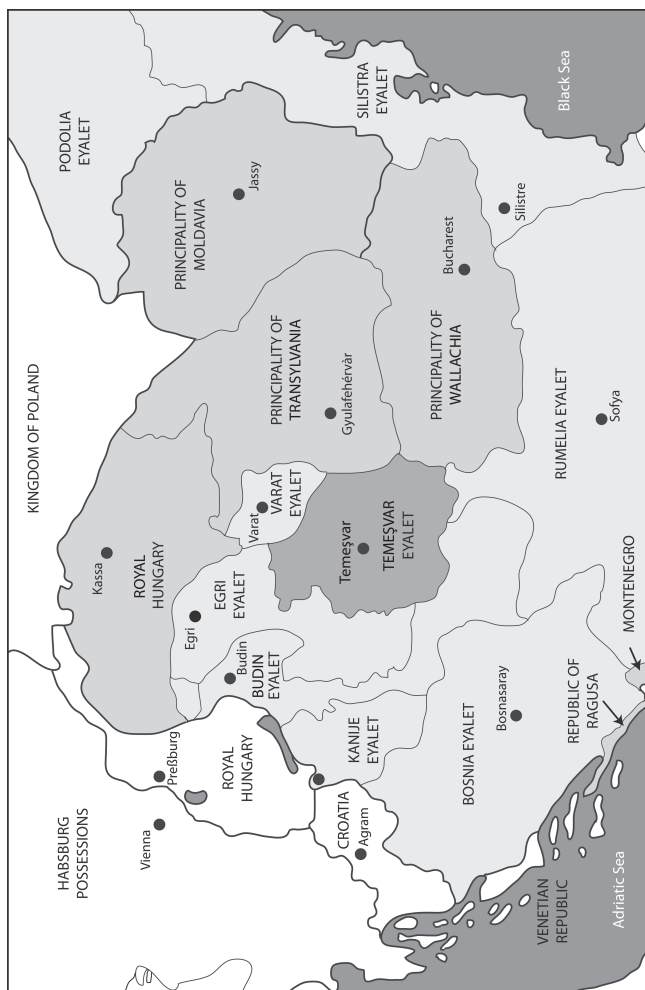
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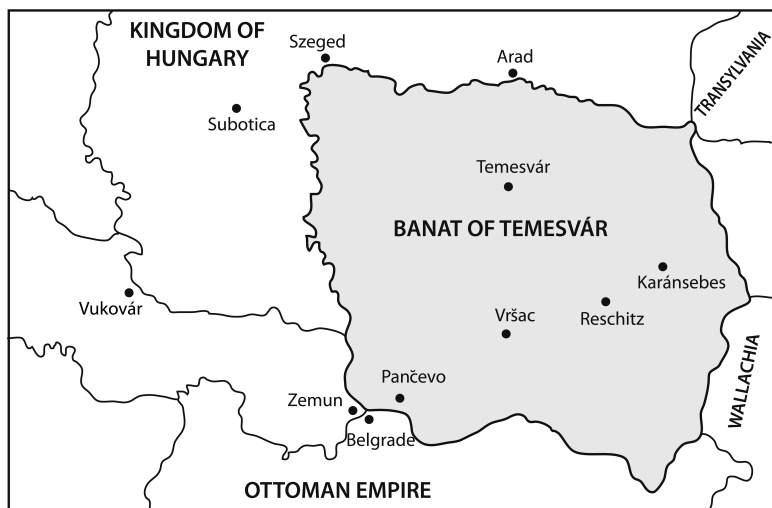
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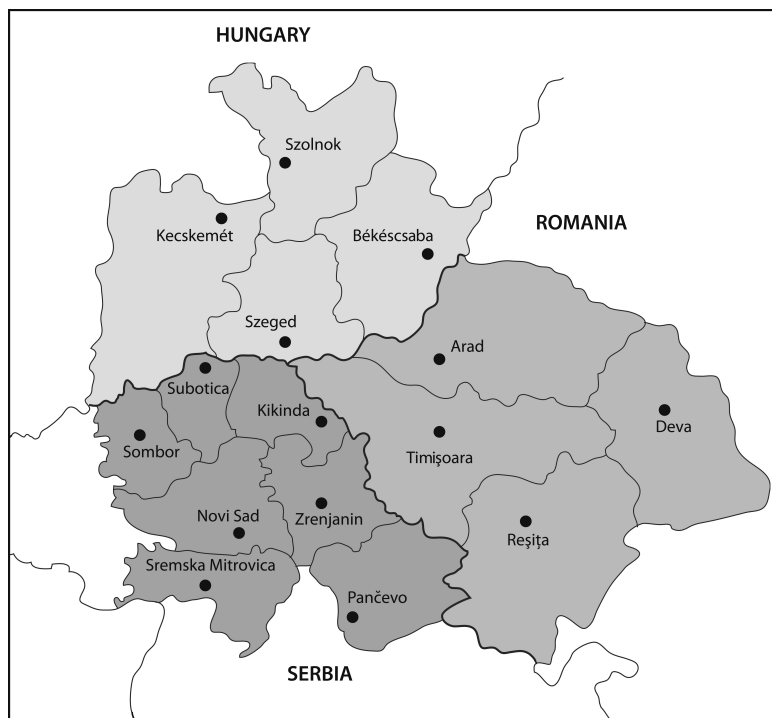
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
or Why Should We Know about Ruritania?

Any place we know nothing about is a Ruritania: it might as well be an altogether imaginary land for all the reality it holds for us. One decides to learn more when enough interesting or arresting things happen there to warrant taking the trouble to dig up information. A book, a historical event, a brief period of television coverage, a famous person, a favourite dish – all of these can take you to an unknown place and make it real for you. The Banat of Temesvár has long since disappeared from maps and is not likely to crop up in everyday conversation or the news, for even when things do happen there reference is usually made to the current borders: south-western Romania, north-eastern Serbia, southern Hungary. So why should one know about the Banat?

The Banat of Temesvár is a historical province currently divided among Romania, Serbia and Hungary, and one of the administrative legacies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is where the Romanian Revolution of 1989 started which brought Ceaușescu's Communist dictatorship to an end; it is the native place of the 2009 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Herta Müller, and the setting for her harrowing novels on oppression in Communist Romania; for a long time the geography of the Banat held the key to navigating the lower Danube River and its ethnic map boasted one of the most

colourful and intricate kaleidoscopes of peoples that the age of empires ever brought together in Europe: Hungarians, Serbs, Romanians, Germans, Bulgarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Roma, Jews, Spaniards, the French, Italians. The history of the Banat is, on a small scale, the history of Central and Eastern Europe with its overlapping imperial rules, population reshuffles, redrawing of boundaries, composite identities, Procrustean nation-states straddling multi-ethnic regions, the onslaught of Communism and its vagaries, and the resuscitation of regionalism within the framework of the European Union.

One seldom wants to read about peaceful, politically unproblematic regions. Their history languishes in local and regional literature, known to the initiated few who venture there or those who stumble upon the place in their voyages. Such places only rise from dusty obscurity if someone strikes oil or draws blood there, and all of a sudden the searchlight of international public attention scrutinizes the place and renders it exceptional. The Yugoslav wars propelled historic provinces such as Bosnia and Kosovo to a sad notoriety, revved up academic interest and set in motion a stream of explanatory historical literature. The problem with such selective attention is that, by looking predominantly at problematic regions and instances of violence, one obtains a rather unbalanced view that reinforces ongoing myths about East-Central Europe as a place of tribal nationalisms and ancient ethnic hatreds. This book sets out to remedy this imbalance by reconstituting the history of the Banat of Temesvár, one of the regions of East-Central Europe which has not acquired the egregious topicality that a contemporary armed conflict must impart upon a place in order for it to become worthy of attention.

The present history will go beyond the temporal landmarks which delimitate the existence of the Banat as a single province (its beginnings as a Habsburg province in the early eighteenth century and its final partition in the aftermath of World War I) and look at both its medieval and early modern roots as well as at the ghost of the province after its dismantling in 1919 and up to the present day. The aim is by no means teleological: in this book I am not seeking to postulate a spurious continuity of the Banat (territorial or otherwise) across time. On the contrary, the book is meant as a historical meditation on

the creative arbitrariness of borders, on how new frontiers disrupt and destroy but also in the long run come to create new meaning and new forms of cohabitation; not least, it is a meditation on how borderlines can spell the difference between life and death, peace and war, prosperity and misery.

This book has not been conceived as an academic tome or a comprehensive, state-of-the-art history of the Banat, but rather as a synoptic narrative and a readable introduction to the place and its peoples, which, while retaining the necessary academic rigour of information and analysis, seeks to stress the idea of change and transformation rather than settle bibliographical disputes.

CHAPTER 2

MEDIEVAL BANS
AND BANATES

East-Central Europe is teeming with place names derived from the
word 'ban'. There is a Romanian and a Serbian Banat; the first Yugoslav
state was divided into *banovinas*, headed by *bans*; there are still official
buildings in Serbia called Ban's Courts. These are reverberations across
time of a long gone medieval form of leadership. Bans and banates are
a legacy of the age of baronage in medieval Hungary. In the fourth
century AD the once far-reaching Roman Empire split down the mid-
dle: the Eastern half, also known as the Byzantine Empire, became
the champion of Orthodox Christianity; the Western half, overrun by
waves of migrating population, broke down into myriads of realms
and principalities, whose ascent to power was buttressed by their con-
version to the Catholic faith. One such wave of migrators who swept
over Central Europe in the tenth century and set up kingdom in the
Pannonian Plain and Carpathian basin were the Hungarians. Extending
southwards beyond the Danube River, their realm pressed against the
embattled Slavic frontiers of the by then decaying Byzantine Empire.
The territories the Hungarians acquired along these contested bor-
derlands were entrusted to royal governors by the name of bans and
came to be known as *banates*. This office was similar to that of the
Lords Marcher in medieval England, who guarded the Welsh borders
(or Welsh Marches), or the Germanic Margraves in charge of frontier
territories, or Marks, in the Holy Roman Empire. Medieval monarchs

needed to protect their frontiers, so they built buffer regions headed by loyal vassal lords. The banates of Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia, and Szörény served just such a purpose along the southern borders of the Hungarian medieval kingdom.

The dearth of documents up until the thirteenth century provides only a fragmentary, jigsaw puzzle-like image of territorial divisions, their names and geographical extent, which to this day is a source of controversy among national historians. Early medieval history in Central and Eastern Europe is heavily politicized and has a long tradition of being appropriated by national histories for polemical purposes. This is partly because so many of the nation-states here owe their political legitimacy, national pride and identity to historical precedents and, partly, because there is such scarce evidence available that conflicting interpretations are easily made. There is a disconcerting quality about the perfectly parallel and disjunctive historical accounts one comes across relative to what is essentially one and the same region. The medieval territory which would later become the Banat of Temesvár partakes in the general historiographical hubris of the region. It is not the aim of this chapter, or this book, to settle historians' disputes, but rather to convey a sense of place as a result of historical flux. The one certainty available about the medieval history of what would later become the Banat of Temesvár is its fluid character.

The dignity of bans as well as the boundaries of these frontier territories waxed and waned and kept pace with the vagaries of military conquest and royal favour. By the twelfth century the Hungarian system of government had changed from a semi-barbaric tribal one to the Western European system of baronage, in which the King 'distributed the income of castles, counties, lands and other income to barons and warriors'.[1] As, up until the thirteenth century, the Hungarian royal household was itinerant, the royal appointees in distant territories of the kingdom acted not only as deputies of the monarch but also as hosts for king and court. Such occasions made visible the delegated and temporary nature of the barons' powers, who for the duration of the royal visit were demoted to the status of mere family members while the king took over all the powers otherwise exercised by the Ban.[2]

In the medieval period Saxons and Szeklers colonized and forti-
fied the south-eastern borderlands of the Hungarian realm within the
arc of the Carpathian Mountains. Lower down, where the mountains
meet the Danube, the same defensive function was held by the Banate
of Szörény, which by the 1230s extended into Wallachia (present-day
southern Romania), east of the River Olt. Up until the fourteenth cen-
tury there were no consolidated states in this region but rather a patch-
work of fiefdoms and local barons switching allegiance between one
king and another, forging alliances and creating ambitious but short-
lived realms. Just like any other medieval monarchs, the Hungarian
kings tried to avoid giving too much power to their magnates and were
likely to withdraw the office of Ban as quickly as they had bestowed
it. If no suitable candidate was readily found to take the place of the
offending predecessor, the place remained vacant and the banate would
slide under the jurisdiction of one of the neighbouring counties (in the
case of the Banate of Szörény this was usually that of the *ispán*, or head,
of the Temes County).[3] The frequent change of bans was given an extra
nudge by crises of dynastic succession, during which territorial reshuf-
fling took place, with barons losing or grabbing lands and castles.

Successively occupied by Bulgarians, Wallachians (Romanians) and
raided by the Tartars, after 1330 the Banate of Szörény lost its posses-
sions across the mountains and east of the River Olt to the Wallachians.
The institutional memory of the banate lingered on in the lost east-
ern territory so that the office of Ban resurfaced later on among the
panoply of Wallachian dignities. The downsized Hungarian Banate of
Szörény, with its remaining castles and fortifications, retained its stra-
tegic importance for the Hungarian kingdom, an importance which
grew in particular after the fall of Serbia under Ottoman rule in the
1390s.[4] At the time castles were the political heartland of the region
as part of a pyramid of power headed by the Ban and other noblemen
in charge of castles and fortresses, while lower down the hierarchy
ruled local leaders known by the Slavic name of *knezes*. These held
sway over individual villages or smaller districts and owed military
allegiance and sundry services to the lord of the castle.[5] As most of the
historical evidence preserved consists of charters and litigation docu-
ments, one forms a clearer picture of the local barons, their dealings

and grievances, than of the ordinary peasants. Royal privileges were bestowed and jealously defended (such as those of the Wallachian districts in mountainous Szörény), assemblies were convened to testify to this or that nobleman's claim to the local fortress and a combination of royal and customary law was used to solve litigations.[6] The peasants only made their presence felt in the documents of the time when Jacqueries such as that led by György Dózsa in the early years of the sixteenth century threatened the old order and took a long time to put down.

The baronial hierarchies holding sway over the territory between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers were swept aside by the armies of the Ottoman Empire, which brought in new masters but left intact the inhabitants' old way of life. The destruction of the previous Hungarian structure of administration made way for the creation of a new Ottoman one, which collated territories that would become a blueprint for the later Banat of Temesvár. Just as the old Banate of Szörény was being obliterated, the template for a new one was already in the making.

CHAPTER 3

UNDER THE SIGN OF
THE CRESCENT

Schimbarea domnilor, bucuria nebunilor
(only fools rejoice at the change of rulers)

Romanian proverb

The armies that battered the walls of Buda and Temesvár in the sixteenth century were those of an empire at the height of its power, which Christian Europe regarded with awe and grudging admiration. The Ottomans conquered south-eastern Hungary between 1526 and 1552 and pressed on to Vienna, aiming for the very heart of Europe. Although very different on the face of it, the new rule changed little at the grassroots level. This was owing to the fundamental rationale behind Ottoman conquests: they were expanding not to civilize or convert, nor to acquire living space, but rather to fuel the formidable war machine which was their state. The nature of their rule reflected their purpose. The new conquests confirmed the Sultan's glorious might over the infidels while providing his empire with money and military manpower. The chequered pattern of Ottoman rule in the territory between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers would show the Muslim warrior empire at its strongest and at its weakest within the span of a century and a half.

Ottoman Power and its Nature

Having started as a small *ghazi* (warrior) state on the outskirts of Anatolia, the Ottomans gradually conquered their way into the

crumbling Mongol Empire in the east and the rickety Byzantine Empire in the west. Not unlike Christianity in the case of European powers, the Islamic faith buttressed Ottoman power and provided its metaphysical justification. It also acted as a structuring, organizational device within the state creating a social hierarchy with Muslims at the top in a privileged position and non-Muslims (called *reâyâ* or *berâyâ* depending on whether they were subject to taxation or not)[1] as underlings. A Muslim would, therefore, stand a better chance of social advancement, take precedence over a non-Muslim before the law and be subject to less taxation. Although of less consequence socially and legally, non-Muslims were vital to the Empire in two ways: economically, they constituted a major source of income since they bore the brunt of taxation; militarily, they formed an important pool of recruitment through the child levy (*devşirme*).

Unlike many of the Christian powers of the time, the Ottomans tolerated other religions and deftly integrated them into the state apparatus. They divided the non-Muslims into *millets* (religious communities) headed by their own leaders, who enjoyed the delegated power of administering the internal affairs of their respective flocks. The Ottoman state was thus completely blind to what, from the nineteenth century onwards, came to be understood as nation or nationality: Serbs, Vlachs, Hungarians, irrespective of their language and customs, were one and the same to the Ottomans: *Giaours* (infidels). As long as money and troops kept coming from a given province and there was relative peace, the Sultan was content to leave administrative matters in the hands of the local *beylerbey* (governor) and of religious leaders.

In the last two centuries of its existence the Ottoman Empire preferred to make vassals of its enemies than conquer them outright. Conquests were costly and presupposed building administration, manning fortresses and, where needed, bringing in Muslim population. The three-pronged pattern of conquest (military defeat of the enemy, negotiated peace and terms of vassalage, and only in the last instance actual transformation into an Ottoman province) revealed the nature of Ottoman rule as a cost-effective military enterprise. The territory between the Tisza, Maros, and Danube rivers went

through all these three stages with the final conquest and transformation into the *Eyalet* of Temesvár as the last resort of Ottoman endeavours.

The Ottoman Puzzle of Possessions in Hungary

The territory between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers was not entirely conquered by the Ottomans: the western and southern parts came under the Sultan's rule in 1552 while the northern and eastern reaches were left under Transylvanian control for a century to come, until the 1650s. This heterogeneous rule was the result of the upheaval produced by the Ottoman conquest in the political tectonic plates of the region. The dynastic rifts and alliances set in motion by the Ottoman occupation of south-eastern Hungary would not only influence immediate history but also create precedents and connections that would plague relations in the region well into the twentieth century: one was the forging of an uneasy and deeply contested connection between the Austrian Habsburgs and the Hungarian Crown; another was the creation of an autonomous Principality of Transylvania under Ottoman suzerainty, detached from royal Hungary and, for a very short period of time, even controlled by the prince of Wallachia, the neighbouring Romanian Principality.

It was not only the territory of Hungary that was divided after the battle of Mohács in 1526 but also its nobility. The death of the Hungarian King Louis II posed the problem of succession and it was over this that the great Hungarian magnates came to disagree. Two centres of power sprang up: those that favoured the crowning of Ferdinand I of Habsburg, brother to the Hungarian King's widow and Austrian monarch, and those that sided with John/János Zápolya, the Transylvanian *voivode*. The latter sought leverage over the former by recognizing Ottoman suzerainty. The Ottomans happily watched the internecine conflict and stoked it to their advantage. When things threatened to get out of hand, they stepped in and conquered some more. This is how they eventually decided in 1552, almost thirty years after Mohács, to conquer Temesvár and create a second Ottoman province in southern Hungary. In the conflict

between the pro-Habsburg and pro-Transylvanian Hungarians, the balance was tipping too far in favour of the former, so the Ottomans were stirred to action.[2]

As with most of south-eastern Europe, lowlands and plains were always easier to invade and conquer than mountains. The peculiarity of this fragmented landscape determined and demarcated areas of political and military domination. Thus, while the marshy lowlands between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers (the western Banat) came under Ottoman rule almost immediately after the fall of Temesvár, the mountainous eastern regions bordering on Wallachia and Transylvania as well as the line of fortresses above the Maros River remained unconquered and retained their Hungarian landlords and administration under the authority of the Transylvanian prince well into the seventeenth century. Even after 1658, when these marginal territories were ceded to the Sultan, the Ottomans were masters of the place in name only: valuable tax-paying villagers fled into Transylvania and Ottoman authorities were at pains to retrieve them.[3]

Ottoman Administrative Reshuffling

Once conquered, the western Banat was gradually integrated into the institutional fabric of the Ottoman Empire as the *Eyalet* of Temesvár. A new social and administrative hierarchy was thus superimposed on the old Hungarian structures. The names were new, the laws were different, but the basic demands on the inhabitants were as old as the hills: paying taxes. The new masters wanted the same as the old ones, only in a new guise.

A *beylerbey* (supreme commander) now headed the newly created *Eyalet* (had he been a Pasha, the territory would have been termed a *Pashalik*) and he had his residence in Temesvár. The territory was subdivided into increasingly smaller administrative units, ranging from *Sandjaks*, the most extensive, to *Nahiye*, the smallest. For efficiency's sake, in most cases the new units closely followed the previous administrative divisions,[4] very much in the way in which new names are given to old streets which may be only slightly enlarged or modified, rather than building new streets from scratch. The land- and

property-owning hierarchical pyramid instituted in the *Eyalet* was structured according to extent and financial yield. Thus, at the top lay the *khas*, a type of property reserved for high dignitaries and the Sultan's relatives, followed by the *ziamet* and the scantiest form of property, the *timar*. Given that the new lands were a vital source of military income, close tabs were kept on them through land surveys (*tahrir*)[5] and a system was put in place for collecting taxes which involved not only Ottoman officials but also local community leaders, such as village *knezes*, who were in charge of tax collection and solving minor legal issues.[6]

In keeping with the Ottoman style of conquest, the population of the new territories who willingly submitted to Ottoman rule without resistance was guaranteed full protection of life, limb, and property. Thus, an order sent on 2 September 1552 to the *Sandjakbeg* of Vidin stipulated that 'respect should be shown to those families that submitted of their own accord and no damage should be done to their lives and goods'.[7] The condition of being allowed to retain one's goods and wealth did not, however, go unqualified. When it came to land ownership, things changed radically, at least as regarded the local nobility. The full conquest of the territory and its transformation into an *Eyalet* transferred landowning rights into the Sultan's hands. He was now the absolute and sole owner of the new possessions and, as such, could dispense with territory as he saw fit and allot land to deserving military commanders and to family in usufruct. This did not differ substantially from the previous Hungarian rule, which was predicated on a similar pattern of land tenure, with the Hungarian king as absolute owner and Hungarian nobility as temporary holders and managers of what was essentially royal land.[8]

The waves of change set in motion by the conquest unsettled the upper strata, the *bene possessionati*, as they were called in Hungarian law, and introduced new, Ottoman taxes for the peasantry. Differences existed between the condition of the peasants on the Sultan's estates and those on the estates of *Sipahis* (Ottoman cavalry commanders). Abuses of power occurred, which resulted in either social unrest among the relevant peasantry or them simply fleeing, which in turn attracted the attention of central authorities. In 1587, Sultan Murad

III ordered the *Beylerbey* of Temesvár to administer severe punishment to all those who 'broke the law and subjected the population to all sorts of works for their own personal benefit'.[9] Thus, any possible problems that might affect the smooth collection of taxes and, therefore, the precious military income became matters of state concern and urgency.

While internal problems could be solved more easily, those stemming from overlapping jurisdictions proved more elusive. In the context of the seventeenth-century transfer of peripheral fortresses from Transylvanian to Ottoman rule, instances of double taxation occurred, which triggered the intervention of Ottoman local authorities. Kuciuk Mehmet Pasha, *Beylerbey* of Temesvár between 1662 and 1663, was thus forced to appeal to Prince Mihaly Apafi of Transylvania, apparently without much success: 'We have written to you several times regarding the situation of the *reâyâ* villages around Ineu and Lipova. Let [the noblemen] withdraw their hand from them, for they are subjects of the Almighty Padishakh [...] and cannot pay their taxes twice.'[10] What was at stake, of course, was not the welfare and prosperity of the local population, but rather the flow of taxes, which was vital for the upkeep of the Ottoman army. It appears, though, that the Ottomans never succeeded in gaining full control of the *Eyalet* peripheries, so that something of a fiscal 'condominium', Ottoman and Hungarian, established itself as a de facto situation.[11]

The pragmatic approach to interacting with the local population became all the more evident during the Habsburg-Turkish wars of the late seventeenth century. The territorial losses of the 1680s (the Ottomans lost Buda and Belgrade to the advancing Habsburg armies) in conjunction with the pressing need for more resources in order to stave off the Christian onslaught forced Ottoman authorities to take unprecedented decisions. In 1690 the Sultan issued a decree whereby the population of the *Eyalet* of Temesvár were given full possession of the land they held.[12] The Sultan was thus forsaking his exclusive right of land ownership to avoid the demographic depletion of a region which had acquired strategic importance to imperial interests in Central Europe and had become the last bastion of direct Ottoman rule north of the Danube.

Ottoman Culture and its Fortresses

In the 164 years of Ottoman rule over the western Banat, Muslim culture remained confined to urban centres. These were foci of administrative and commercial power, and understandably had the greatest concentration of Ottoman population, which had arrived with the new rulers, while rural areas remained untouched by the customs of the conquerors and were governed by means of intermediaries.

Ottoman culture in the newly conquered territories was by necessity a fortress culture. As has been pointed out, towns in sixteenth-century south-eastern Europe were small, with the great majority of the population living in rural areas.[13] The towns that did exist were, more often than not, part of a fortress or in close proximity to one. Under the Ottomans they turned into islands of Muslim culture. The social and institutional face of towns changed with the arrival of a new ruling class. Ottoman canonical law was administered by a *Kadi*, or judge, who also cumulated many of the functions of a notary and mayor. Muslim families were colonized to man the new bureaucratic machine. *Djamis*, or mosques, came to dominate the townscape, newly-built or through the transformation of old churches. The *Hammam*, or public baths, accompanied them as a religious requirement for the purification of the body before prayer. The now everyday café was then a new and dangerous thing in the Muslim Empire and, although an Ottoman imperial prohibition tried to clamp down on its proliferation as a potential source of political dissent, here on the outskirts of the Ottoman world it flourished. Well before the days of zoos, the strange sight of camels and mules brought in by the Ottomans frightened the local peasants, much to the amusement of Evliya Çelebi, the famous seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller.[14]

The Tortoise of Temesvár

Situated at the crossroads leading to Buda and to Vienna, the fortress of Temesvár provided access to Hungary and Transylvania as well as to the rest of Central Europe and functioned as a bridgehead for further conquests and controlling already secured territories. Strategically

built amidst marshlands in between the branches of the River Temes, the fortress was described by Evliya Çelebi as a *kaplum bagea* or tortoise, with its fortified shell resting on four legs or bastions wedged deep into the marshy waters.[15] Eighteenth-century Ottoman geographers similarly presented it as 'an island in a deep river' girded by bog and reed thickets, which rendered it virtually impregnable.[16] Under Hungarian rule it was reinforced using Italian engineers and after the 1552 conquest the new masters would continue to maintain and strengthen it. The 'Tortoise' was an invaluable defence, whose loss or gain meant losing or gaining virtual control of the whole region and of the highways to neighbouring provinces.

Apart from its defensive function, the citadel was, owing to its administrative importance, one of the centres of Ottoman social life and culture in the province. In the 1660s, Evliya Çelebi counted in the fortress four *Djamis*, seven schools, three inns, four 'beautiful baths' and a thriving *Cearşi*, or marketplace. The town proper was divided into ten districts, or *Mahalle*, with spacious, one- or two-storey houses, gardens and vineyards, as well as ten *Djamis* for prayer. As Çelebi remembered, its inhabitants were merry and even-tempered, mostly soldiers, merchants and 'learned men', wearing green felt hats (a colour only Muslims were allowed to wear) and thick pointed shoes.[17] So distinctive and colour-coded were the garments worn within Ottoman fortresses that it was easy enough to identify someone's rank and social standing by merely looking at his/her clothes. Thus, the late seventeenth-century Ottoman cavalry officer and interpreter from Temesvár, Osman Aga recounted in his famous autobiography how he sought to escape capture in the besieged fortress of Lipova by manipulating precisely these sartorial conventions: 'I kept none of my clothes and put on instead clothes which were commonly worn by frontier people, a dark-green cloth jacket, tight scarlet-coloured trousers with bright red stripes, a girth made of crimson-coloured rope and a fur hat of the same colour which I had turned inside out; I also shrouded myself in a white rain cloak and smeared my face with dust.'[18]

Other fortress towns depicted by Çelebi in his book of travels resembled, on a smaller scale and with local variations, the layout of Temesvár: the actual fortress, with a fortified core and an inner city,

and, more often than not, a town outside the citadel proper. Such were the fortresses of Csanád and the above-mentioned Lipova in the far north of the *Eyalet*, Orsova in the south on the Danube, Versetz and Panciova in the south-west, Lugoj and Karánsebes in the north-east. Minarets and the imposing residence of the *Bey* shaped their skyline and in the bigger forts a central market, or bazaar, took pride of place. Fortresses were mostly populated by Muslims; some had also separate *Giaour* (Christian) neighbourhoods. The countryside beyond their walls, however, was a world apart, the world of the *reâyâ*, the subject infidels, who remained outside the culture of Ottoman fortresses, just as they remained shadowy and slightly exotic outsiders in Çelebi's famous travelogue.

The Waning Crescent

Ottoman rule in southern Hungary was anything but static or stable. The first couple of decades were taken up with the violent conflict surrounding Hungarian succession. For the rest of the time they were in power, the Ottomans sought to consolidate their hold on Buda and Temesvár, but their dominion was constantly challenged by Christian powers. The permanent tug-of-war that held the region in its grip for almost two centuries resulted in population movements from the Ottoman *Eyalet* to Transylvania and across the mountains into Wallachia, or, as we shall see further on, from the Serbian territories recuperated by the Ottomans from the Austrians after the Great Austro-Turkish war of 1683–1699. The ebb and flow of wartime migration belied the actual power of the Ottomans over the conquered territories, engendering outlawry and the fear of rampaging armies among the local population. As Osman Aga remembered in his autobiography, the Christian armies were as ruthless and savage in their style of conquest as the Ottomans. The taking of Szolnok, Szaras, Arad and Csanád by the Habsburg troops resulted in massive destruction and plundering of the said fortified towns as well as of the surrounding villages, so that 'most of the *Reâyâ* of the Temesvár province scattered into the four winds and their villages lay abandoned' while the whole frontier region looked desolate and devoid of life.[19] Little wonder

that, once the whole territory of the Ottoman *Eyalet* was firmly under Habsburg control, the population were distrustful and elusive.

The period of territorial contraction that the Ottoman Empire embarked on starting from the seventeenth century was ushered in by the most ambitious of Ottoman offensives, the second Siege of Vienna (1683), the first one having taken place, and failed, in 1529 under the leadership of the formidable Suleyman the Magnificent. For a second time the Ottomans tried in vain to conquer Vienna, which, for all the destruction wrought around it and across Austrian lands, remained indomitable. The danger posed to the Christian powers had the reverse effect and resulted in a concentration of military forces which managed not only to repel the Ottoman offensive but also to oust the Ottomans from southern Hungary altogether.

The Habsburg troops, who got as far as Belgrade and Kosovo, were eventually forced to withdraw from Serbia along a line north of the Danube and the Sava rivers. In their retreat they were accompanied by a massive wave of Serbian refugees, who fearing Ottoman reprisals and spurred on by the promise of support and protection from the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I, moved across the new border together with the Orthodox Patriarch of Peć and settled in southern Hungary. This was one of the most famous instances of demographic haemorrhage that Ottoman territories experienced and went down into history as the Great Serb Migration. In 1691 Emperor Leopold I granted the refugees the so-called 'Serb Privilege', which ensured they were free to practise their Orthodox faith under their own ecclesiastic leaders, whom they themselves elected. These generous dispensations were given in exchange for loyalty and military support against the Ottomans. They were also granted as a temporary measure, the Habsburgs being confident in their power to snatch the Balkans from Ottoman hands and thus allow the refugees to return to their original homes, or in the chartered words of the Habsburg Emperor: 'We will also make every possible endeavour to return the said Rascian [Serb] people, through Our victorious arms, with the help of God, as speedily as possible, into their former territories and habitations, and to expel enemies therefrom.'[20] The Balkans, however, remained in Ottoman hands well into the nineteenth century and the Habsburgs

had to content themselves with the territories of the old medieval kingdom of Hungary.

The Serbian refugees never returned home; their temporary stay in southern Hungary, including what would become the Banat of Temesvár, became permanent and their ad hoc privileges set a legal precedent in the enlarged Habsburg Empire. Moreover, by settling in Habsburg Hungary, they ended up buttressing its demographic potential and, thus, its military strength. The life that awaited them in the trans-Danubian plain was far from that one expects to find in a promised land, which squared with the conditions of their initial arrival: they did not willingly migrate there, nor was the land ever promised to them as anything else than a temporary haven. In his novel dedicated to the Great Serb Migration and its aftermath, Miloš Tsernianski, the twentieth-century Serbian writer, captured in the words of his warrior character Vuk Isaković the life of misery and poverty that kept the colonists on the move:

> He came to feel the futility of the lives they were living, lives of migration, colonization, of lamenting the dead and bringing new people into the world, there along the Danube. He imagined escaping the vapours of the swamps and marshes, the endless day-to-day suffering caused by moving from place to place, watching cattle drown, ploughing through mud and bogs.[21]

The people thus uprooted moved with the border, more often than not acting as border guards for the Habsburg Emperor and following the line of Christian conquests into Ottoman territory. Subsequent Habsburg military victories pushed the boundaries of their dominion beyond the frontier initially established along the Tisza and Maros Rivers. The dissolution of this fortified line in 1741 gave rise to renewed migration: some of the frontier population followed the new border and settled in the Habsburg Banat, others chose to move to Russia. The Serbs that remained in southern Hungary clung to their 1691 religious privileges and braved the onslaught of Catholicism in its virulent Jesuit form throughout the eighteenth century. As will become apparent in Chapters Five and Seven, the Serbian Privileges

became the model for a new nation in the Habsburg Empire and, although never fully put into practice (the Serbs were never granted a *Voivode*, or military leader), they would give a boost to the religious and cultural development of Serbs north of the Danube. Politically, the privileges functioned very much like a latent gene in the body politic of the Habsburg Monarchy, which at times of crisis would be reactivated in the form of Serbian demands for a Voivode and a territory of their own, Vojvodina.

* * *

Ottoman rule in the territory between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers differed to a certain extent from other Ottoman provinces in its frontier quality. The *Pashalik* of Buda and the *Eyalet* of Temesvár formed the interface between Christian and Muslim powers as well as being the Ottoman Empire's high-water mark of military conquest in Europe. By their very nature, frontiers share some of the characteristics of the imperial centre but are also porous spaces, open to external influences. A contested frontier region, moreover, such as the *Eyalet* of Temesvár, was even more dynamic and given to upheavals. The Habsburg conquest of the province in the early eighteenth century wiped out the edifice of Ottoman administration and pulled down the religious symbols of the Muslim faith. The colonized Muslim population withdrew with the remainder of Ottoman administration. More than a century later the Scottish traveller A.A. Paton, a diplomat and member of the Royal Geographical Society of London, was to comment on the remarkable lack of traces of the province's Ottoman past. In Temesvár, he noted in 1861, 'even the mosques which were built of stone have disappeared; two of them immediately after the conquest, reconstructed as churches, were pulled down, and the modern church of the Franciscans and the Bishop's Seminary occupy their place. I felt curious to see in Temesvár, or its environs, something of the Turkish period, but except a tombstone embedded in the wall of an edifice, and a small suburb which still bears the Arabic name of "Mahala", memorials of the quondam masters of Hungary are no longer visible.'[22]

But although a direct Ottoman legacy was no longer apparent, the century-and-a-half of Ottoman occupation had a number of profound, if unintended, consequences. The ravages of war and vagaries of government set waves of population in motion and created an elusive demographic pattern that would continue to plague Habsburg authorities for years to come after they secured the province. Another consequence of Ottoman rule was the effect it had on autochthonous social structures: by retaining village and community leaders such as *knezes* and *voivodes* and using them at the capillary level of Ottoman administration, they preserved virtually unaltered, as if in amber, a social institution which went back to the medieval period and endured well into the eighteenth century, when it would be taken over and built on by the local Habsburg administration. Perhaps the most important legacy of Ottoman rule in the region was that, by incorporating the disparate Hungarian counties and banates between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers into the new, overarching unit of the *Eyalet*, the Ottomans set an administrative precedent for hiving off this region from the rest of historical Hungary. When the Habsburgs conquered it in the early eighteenth century, the Ottoman *Eyalet* had already become a blueprint for the Banat of Temesvár as a compact territory subtending and unifying the former medieval administrative units into a regional whole. The province had come into being.

CHAPTER 4

HABSBURG BORDERLAND

'The Banat is the cornucopia, not only of Hungary, but of the whole of the Austrian Empire; – even Lombardy, highly favoured as it is by nature, must yield precedence to the Banat of Temesvár; and one must go to the Delta of the Nile to find a similar soil.'[1] It was A.A. Paton who enthused thus in the early 1860s over the riches of the southern Hungarian province. 130-odd years before, the same province would have elicited a very different response from a like-minded traveller. The history of Habsburg rule over the Banat of Temesvár is the story of the radical transformation of a war-ravaged, destitute land into the prosperous 'European province' that Paton held in such admiration; it is also the story of a province created and then divided in the tug-of-war between Habsburg Emperor and Hungarian estates.

Winner Takes All

By 1718 the Habsburgs had conquered their way into southern Hungary securing all of Transylvania, the Banat of Temesvár and northern Serbia, including Belgrade. Their armies were only Habsburg in name and purpose as, in the words of their most illustrious general, Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736), 'there were many Austrians at the court and few in the army' for 'the heads and eldest sons of

families never serve in this county'.[2] Eugene himself was a descendant of French-Italian aristocracy from the Duchy of Savoy and could barely speak German. As a reject of the French court (he was denied a military career in France on account of his puny physique) he switched allegiance to the Habsburgs, in whose armies he shot up the military ranks and proved, well before Napoleon would make it resoundingly obvious, that brains are worth much more in a military commander than sheer brawn.

The Conqueror of Temesvár, as Eugene of Savoy came to be known, was a professional soldier who, as soon as one campaign ended, would cross over the other side of Europe and begin a new one. The few years of peace he spent in Vienna amidst diplomatic negotiations were, by his own admission, more fatiguing to him than those of war.[3] Having made a name for himself in the Battle of Zenta (1697) against the Ottomans, he was entrusted with full military command of the next Habsburg advance into Ottoman territory (1715–1718). He took the fortresses of Petrovaradin, Temesvár and eventually Belgrade through a combination of military prowess, diehard stubbornness and some favourable weather. As he remembered after his unlikely victory in the Battle of Belgrade, which had kept the Habsburgs on tenterhooks and threatened to end in a major disaster, 'at Vienna the devotees cried out *a miracle!* those who envied me cried out, *Good fortune!*'[4] He would have kept on battling against the Ottomans, but for the eventual decision of the two sides to conclude peace: 'The Turks were desirous of making peace, and so was the Emperor. I could have done very well without it, for I confess that I loved war. All the different courts sent negotiators to Passarowitz. To obtain better conditions I marched to the Grand Vizier, who had arrived with his army near Nissa. I should have been very successful, for he had only eighty thousand men; and I was well disposed to give him battle when a cursed courier came and brought me the unwelcome tidings that the treaty of peace had been signed on 21st of July. Among us it was called only a truce, which might be prolonged as long as they pleased or which might be broken according to circumstances. It lasted only twenty five years.'[5]

With the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718) the Habsburgs retrieved the last pieces of the great Hungarian territorial puzzle, which the Ottomans had broken up almost 200 years before. The Hungarian Kingdom retrieved its medieval borders, but these were no longer of its own making. The Habsburgs possessed themselves of this territory *jure belli*, by right of conquest, and they ran no charity. The Habsburg Emperor being one and the same as the Hungarian King,[6] he could decide, as it best suited him, which jurisdiction the *neoacquisitum*, or newly-acquired territory, should fall under: Habsburg imperial or Hungarian royal.

Although conquered de facto in 1716, the Banat was ceded *de jure* by the Sultan to the Habsburg Crown in 1718 following the Peace of Passarowitz (Požarevac). The newly conquered territory did not revert to its pre-Ottoman status, that is, it was not retroceded to the Hungarian Crown. Invoking a promise made in the 1715 Diet, the Hungarian estates demanded a *restitutio in integrum*, the full restoration of the territory to the Hungarian Crown and, from an administrative point of view, a return to the county system which had existed prior to 1552. The Banat, however, became instead a Crown land administered as a *neoacquisitum* (newly acquired territory), meaning that, from a political and legal point of view, the slate was wiped clean so that no landownership rights prior to 1716 were recognized.

A threefold rationale lay behind this decision: military, political and economic. In military matters, the Habsburgs followed the victor's advice: Eugene of Savoy urged the monarch to assume the title of *dominum terrestre* (master of the land) on top of his absolutistic *summus principatus* (supreme lordship/dominion).[7] Retaining direct control of a region close to the border with the Ottoman Empire made perfect sense from a strategic point of view. Developing this thought further, Prince Eugene presented the Banat as a necessary imperial wedge between the Hungarians and the Ottomans, who might otherwise be inclined to conspire together against the Habsburgs.[8] Politically speaking, giving up a potentially rich and fertile province would only have added to the might of the restive Hungarian estates, the

memory of whose latest rebellion was still fresh in the Habsburgs' mind. While all these motivations will have carried some weight in the making of the final decision, the most convincing argument against returning the Banat to the Hungarians must, no doubt, have been the economic one. The Emperor's fiscal advisers had learned their 'Karlowitz' lesson and were unwilling to make the same mistake twice: the territory that the Peace of Karlowitz (1699) confirmed as the possession of the Habsburg Emperor had been organized into *latifundia* and given to local landlords; the upshot of this was that the peasants, being thus subjected to redoubled manorial corvées, were able to pay only a meagre part of the taxes levelled on them by the state. Given the great expenses incurred by the imperial authorities to conquer the Banat, they were not going to give it away, but rather reap full and unmediated benefits from it.[9]

Under the Habsburgs the pattern of landholding was similar to that imposed by previous rulers: just like the Ottomans and the Hungarians before them, the Habsburg Emperor was the absolute owner of the land, which was allotted to the inhabitants within a limited tenure framework. The same administrative expedient resorted to by previous rulers was applied this time as well. Effective contact with the population of the newly conquered territory could only be established by mediation. Thus, the village *knezes* were retained and absorbed within the Habsburg administrative system, so much so that a new position came into being which was modelled on the *knez* function. The *oberknez* was an Austrian creation and endured until 1776. Unlike the *knezes*, the *oberknezes* were not elected by the villagers but appointed by the Banat governor and enjoyed the benefits of a salaried functionary.[10]

The administrative pyramid set up by the Habsburgs to govern the Banat had at its top the Imperial Aulic Chamber (*Hofkammer*) in Vienna, which directed the reorganization of the province by means of a commission (*Landesadministration des Temeser Banats*) and a governor (the first was one of Prince Eugene's generals, Graf Florimond de Mercy). The Banat was divided into 13 districts, governed by district administrators. Further down the hierarchy, there were the above-mentioned *Oberknezes*, who presided over several villages; in

every Serbian or Romanian village there was a *Knez* and, if the village happened to be German, the local community leader was a *Schulze*.[11]

Demographic Quicksand

Although a lot of financial and military effort went into the retrieval of Hungarian lands from the Ottomans, the victors' task was not over with the conclusion of the Treaty of Passarowitz. As expected, apart from the ongoing border skirmishes, the Ottomans were likely to strike back and indeed did so 20 years later. But the most formidable task of all was to make the new conquests economically viable: war-ravaged territory and a fleeing population rendered the Banat a blessing in a very cunning disguise. This became particularly apparent during the new war and afterwards, when the first moves were made towards the militarization of south-eastern Banat.

War raged again for two years in the Banat of Temesvár between 1737 and 1739. The hostilities between the Habsburgs (this time, allied with Russia) and the Ottoman Empire resulted in heavy losses for the Austrians, who were forced to withdraw and conclude a separate peace, thereby ceding Belgrade and Little Wallachia (*Klein Wallachei*) to the Ottomans. The Banat became borderland once again.

During the conflict the local population took to the forests and mountains in what had by then become a cyclical, ebb-like movement typical of war-depleted borderlands. 20 years after the Peace of Passarowitz, which had made the Banat a Habsburg possession, the new authorities had developed but a feeble hold on the sparse, elusive population of the province. Faced with impending destruction at the hands of the Turks, the people sided with the strongest, placated, and bribed in order to survive. A Banat chronicler, Nicolae Stoica de Hațeg, depicted such negotiations with the invaders:

Omer Pasha together with his 2000 [soldiers] crossed over at Orsova and coming across many stores he was content and

set up camp. Many old Romanians came to him through the woods with gifts from the villages and he received them. [The Romanians] even told him how the Turks could get to the main thoroughfare across Strajovaţ, Mehádia's hill.[12]

And later:

Omer Pasha settled as ruler in Mehádia fortress. The villagers who had fled to the woods came and bowed in submission to him and brought him rams, lambs, butter, and cheese as gifts. And the Pasha gave them writs for safe-passage called *buruntii* (salva guardie), and a Turk or two *subpasha* and Sipahi to bring their people back to their villages.[13]

At this point in time neither Ottomans nor Habsburgs could permanently enlist the locals' allegiance. Sources[14] tell of a population unmoored by any loyalty, not genuinely swayed either way but rather acting on sheer survival instinct. According to Marshal Marmont, Duke of Ragusa:

The long wars between Hungary and Turkey and the following devastations had reduced the frontier population to a most destitute state: often dispossessed, tossed about by the whims of fate, forced to lead a life on the run, full of misery.[15]

The centrifugal tendencies particularly of the Orthodox peoples in the Banat prompted a note of caution in mid-eighteenth-century British diplomatic correspondence surrounding the Turkish war of 1737–1739. The province surfaces here as the background to the intersecting interests of Moscow, Vienna, and Constantinople in the lower Danube region. Thus Sir Everard Fawkener, the British ambassador in Constantinople, briefly referred to the Banat of Temesvár in the context of the ambivalent relations between Vienna and Moscow:

there are considerations of the greatest Moment why they [i.e. the Austrians] should desire the Russians may not pass the river Bog. They would then become borderers, and a weak declining

Empire is a less dangerous neighbour than one that is in full strength and vigour. Moldavia and Valachia are open as well as rich provinces, and he who is Master of the first, may possess them both as soon as he can march over them. The Inhabitants are all of the greekish Religion, and look upon the Czarina as their natural Protectress, as those of the Banat of Temeswar. The German Valackia, Servia and Sclavonia are all zealous Professors of the same Religion, and not in the most easy situation as to their civil government. If a powerfull Prince was in possession of the neighbouring Provinces it would be impossible to keep the people from revolting or deserting their Country. I may deceive myself but these Notions have so far possessed me that if the Czarina should advance towards the Danube, I shall expect to see a very sudden change in the sentiments of the Courts of Vienna and Petersburg towards each other.

(Letter addressed to the Duke of Newcastle from Constantinople on 16 May 1736)[16]

The image conveyed is that of Habsburg authorities faced with the spectre of their newly acquired subjects gravitating towards Russia for support and, as was to happen one decade later, even for permanent residence. Vienna's fears of Russian influence over its own peoples became reality after the dissolution of the Tisza-Maros frontier (1741), when a considerable number of former frontiersmen migrated to Russia to form what was to become the New Serbia settlement.[17] This demographic haemorrhage was doubly detrimental as it depleted the Habsburg lands of valuable taxpayers and, at the same time, supplemented Russia's population and, implicitly, its financial and military power. In his dispatches to the Russian Tsarina Elizabeth, Mikhail Bestuzhev, the Russian Ambassador in Vienna, strongly advocated Serbian migration from Austrian lands, highlighting the advantages this might bring to Russian geopolitics:

A large-scale migration of Orthodox Serbs promised Russia immediate defence benefits in the Ukraine as well as long-term

strategic gains in the Balkans: emigration would rekindle the Petrine tradition of support for the Balkan Orthodox and 'might in time bear exceptionally good fruit'.[18]

The prospect of large-scale migration loomed large and ominous in the Habsburg lands so that preventative measures and repopulation policies, including budding sanitation schemes, topped the agenda of the imperial authorities in Vienna for most of the eighteenth century.

Laboratory of Imperial Policies

The eighteenth century was a century of absolutism and political centralization in Europe and the Habsburg Monarchy was no exception. Beginning with Emperor Karl VI and gaining momentum under his daughter, Maria Theresa, the centralization policies of the House of Habsburg sought to transform the straggling conglomeration of historical provinces which made up its territory into an integrated, efficient state, which would be able to prosper and withstand the military challenges of rising powers such as Prussia and Russia. Economic and military issues being interconnected, it is no coincidence that endeavours to resuscitate the imperial economy were concomitant with the reorganization of the army along professional lines. In order to have a strong army, one needed money and, therefore, a strong economy.

The solution came in the form of a doctrine by the name of Mercantilism, which had dominated Western European economies since the sixteenth century. The basic idea behind it was to boost the state income by an increase in the taxable power of consumption and productivity of the imperial subjects. Commerce was thus particularly encouraged (the name of the doctrine itself ultimately deriving from Latin *mercari*, meaning to trade) with a view to establishing a positive balance between imports and exports. Less reliance on imports meant a certain amount of economic self-sufficiency and could make the difference between victory and defeat in a protracted war.

Central to the mercantilist doctrine was the repopulation of depleted territories through colonization, thus enabling the full use of imperial lands for taxation purposes. The depopulated state of the Banat

and its direct administration by Vienna turned the southern province into a laboratory of imperial policy experimentation. Several waves of colonization brought manpower and expertise to the war-ravaged territories. The most important numerically as well as economically were the German settlers, who arrived in several waves during the reigns of Karl VI and Maria Theresa. They were followed by Bulgarians, Armenians, Italians, even Czechs.

While it may be tempting to look upon the influx of German colonists as an attempt by the imperial authorities to 'Germanize' the new province, this was hardly the case. This would be a nationalist rationale which was simply out of place at the time. That the driving force behind these colonizations was economic is proved by the ethnic mixture of the population brought in as well as by the professional specialities of the newcomers: Italians were welcomed into the Banat on account of their silkworm growing skills (the production of locally grown silk was one of the successful experiments introduced by imperial authorities, who had realized its lucrative potential from their Italian territories, and that the Banat offered the right type of climate for growing mulberry trees); German settlers were attracted to the eastern Banat to use their mining skills in extracting copper, iron, silver and slate from the rich Carpathian mountains; Armenians were given religious privileges in order to come to the Banat to ply their precious trade of producing Cordoba leather; the Bulgarians who migrated from Ottoman lands in the latter part of Karl's reign were good farmers and cattle breeders and, as such, beneficial for Habsburg commerce.[19]

Colonization was also used to introduce new methods of cultivating the land, which was mainly dominated by pastures (most of the autochthonous population being cattle-farmers) or corn fields. The German peasants brought with them the three-field system of agriculture, more modern land tilling tools and knowledge of how to use the land effectively and to the best of its potential. Thus the cultivation of wheat was introduced on a large scale for export purposes as well as industrial plants, tobacco and fruit trees.[20] As late as 1815, an Orthodox priest in Mehádia (the militarized part of the Banat) was urging his fellow priests and parishioners to grow potatoes, a crop

which had become extensive in northern Europe and which only waves of famine would recommend as a staple crop in Russia and Eastern Europe.[21]

Such economic and population schemes, together with infrastructure improvement works (such as building roads, canals, draining marshes and reclaiming arable land) were possible (if not always successful) primarily owing to the unmediated character of Habsburg rule over the province: there was no landed aristocracy in the Banat with whom the Habsburg imperial authorities would have to negotiate these projects or whose customary privileges they would have to observe. The only obstacles to overcome (tackling which, as it turned out, was no mean feat in itself) were bureaucratic corruption, an unruly populace and adverse climactic conditions. All of these would be dealt with, hands-on, by Maria Theresa's son and maverick co-regent, Joseph II.

A Province Run Out of a Stagecoach

Although more often than not held up as a representative of enlightened absolutism, Joseph II was not the typical eighteenth-century monarch. Weaned on French physiocratic philosophy, he was as austere in dress as he was curt in manners, hated court pomp, treated his ministers and civil servants as he did his soldiers and was bent on single-handedly running his empire by literally making his presence felt in every corner of it. His voyages across the Habsburg lands were evidence of a peripatetic style of government. These *Hofreisen*, or imperial journeys, set tongues wagging and upset the complacency of many a Habsburg official in the far-away provinces of the empire. According to B.A. Riedesel, the Prussian minister in Vienna, these journeys had become a standing joke with Joseph's enemies, who derisively commented that the Emperor governed his state out of a stagecoach.[22] As Mitrofanov pointed out, the *Hofreisen* counted among the most powerful cultural influences on the Habsburg Monarch: 'They were his favourite pastime and seldom did a year go by without him either visiting one of his remote provinces or going abroad.'[23]

Joseph II was one step ahead of his provincial bureaucracy, visiting barracks and villages, sleeping in common inns, and inspecting the

progress of works to be done. The first of his journeys to the Banat of
Temesvár was undertaken in 1768 while Joseph was still a co-regent.
His impressions of the province were searing in their criticism, the
young Emperor depicting in a report to his mother, Empress Maria
Theresa, *'un villain tableau des administrations et des places qui y existent'*
[a wretched picture of the place and its administration].[24] Obviously
mistrustful of the Banat administration, the Emperor came back again
in 1770 on a second trip, about which little is known:

> it seems that, being dissatisfied with the slow progress of the
> changes ordered on his first journey, the Emperor insisted on
> returning to the Banat without any warning so as to get objec-
> tive information and to be able to take the necessary measures to
> put things right.[25]

Most importantly, and unlike any other monarch before or after him,
Joseph II went to the people and talked to them. Numerous stories,
some genuine, others fantasies, of the monarch receiving peasant del-
egations and sackfuls of petitions, talking to them via *Dolmetscher*, or
interpreter, or even trying to speak their own language, sprang up dur-
ing his reign and endured well into the nineteenth century. The myth
of the 'Good Emperor' lending a sympathetic ear to popular grievances
may not have started with him, but his imperial actions were cer-
tainly grist to the mill of popular emotional memory. Unlike the dis-
tant image of the 'Good Tsar' among Russian peasants, the Habsburg
Emperor set legends in motion by actually being in the midst of his
subjects and interacting with them, usually at the expense of local
potentates. This symbolic capital, however, derived as it was from tam-
pering with traditional local power structures and jurisdictions, came
at a price. As P.G.M. Dickson put it, 'Joseph's Hungarian reforms
affronted the interests of every class, except perhaps the peasantry'.[26]

Militarization

During Joseph's visits to Hungary, the army and military fortifications
figured prominently on the imperial agenda. On his third visit to the

Banat in 1773, the Emperor checked on the state of his frontier troops and the progress they had made, or failed to make, since his last visit, as well as looking into the administrative and the economic problems of the place. A new segment of the military border was being organized at the time in the Banat by placing the villages along a narrow frontier strip in the south-eastern part of the province under military administration. Repeated conflicts with the Porte and, in particular, the 1737–1739 war, which ended with the loss of Belgrade and Oltenia (Little Wallachia), had brought home the strategic importance of the Banat as a line of defence and the need for a defence system more effective than the existing frontier militia.

This had been the rationale behind the formation of the Habsburg Military Border, or *Militärgrenze*, a defence line going back to the sixteenth century and functioning as a buffer zone between the Habsburg possessions and the Ottoman Empire. Before the eighteenth century, this militarized territory had only a loose organizational structure. As it gradually extended from the Adriatic all the way to the Transylvanian border of the Empire, it acquired institutions of its own and developed a self-sustaining economic system based on a feudal-type distribution of land in exchange for military service placed under the control of a centralized military administration. The Military Border came into its own as an institution during the reign of Empress Maria Theresa as part of wide-sweeping reforms in the sphere of the military following the loss of Silesia to the Prussians. By reorganizing the Military Border the Habsburgs were thus aiming to 'convert an irregular frontier militia into a rigidly disciplined and ever-ready military force, maintained at little or no cost to the state in times of peace'.[27]

The setting up of a new military border establishment became necessary after the dissolution of the Tisza-Maros (Tisa-Mureş) *confinium* in 1741, a defence line introduced at the turn of the century and marking, at the time, the latest Habsburg advance into Ottoman territory. The second wave of Habsburg conquests culminating with the Treaty of Passarowitz pushed the frontier line farther south to include the Banat, northern Serbia and little Wallachia, and thus rendered an inland military border superfluous. The influx of former frontiersmen from the Tisza-Maros area together with

refugees from Serbia, lost to the Ottomans in 1739, required a solution of relocation.

As the initial frontier militia in the Banat proved unsatisfactory upon later inspection in terms of discipline, training and territorial distribution,[28] Habsburg authorities proceeded to militarize the southern Banat and to assimilate it into the administrative system of the Croatian and Slavonian Military Border. Between 1765 and 1768 three new Military Border subdivisions were formed: the Illyrian Border Regiment, the German Border Regiment and a Wallachian Battalion reinforced by later additions.

A population that had been tossed around and taught to flee for its life by years of wars and pillage will not be easily tamed, least of all trussed into a military uniform. Militarization in the Banat started as a manhunt and ended as a love affair. As Joseph's 1773 visit was to show, pinning down the elusive population of the Banat mountains and drafting them into the imperial army as frontiersmen meant confronting the inbred distrust and intractability of a people for whom survival depended on eluding the grasp of the powers that be. As we shall see in a later chapter, less than a century later, amidst the confusion of the 1848–49 upheavals, the descendants of these fleeing peasants were to become the Habsburg Emperor's most loyal subjects.

The already-militarized villages, on the other hand, enjoyed the boon of imperial favour and secured from the Emperor the promise of bigger plots of land and better weaponry.[29] Little by little, using the strategy of the carrot rather than the stick, the imperial authorities managed to drive home to the Banat frontier population the mutual benefits of militarization. This would become even more apparent when the rest of the province was eventually returned to the Hungarians in 1779 and integrated into the county system.

The Military Border Constitution of 1807 (*die Grundgesetze der Karlstädter, Warasdiner, Banal, Slavonischen und Banatischen Militär-Grenze*) stipulated that the overriding purpose of this institution was the provision of military service. Everything else was, therefore, perceived as subordinate to this ultimate goal. This defence system was predicated on usufruct of land and other possessions in exchange for military service. The land was, thus, literally divided into *Militär-Lehen*

(military fiefs), the Emperor retaining absolute possession over them in direct, unmediated fashion (*jus domini directi*).[30] Following the same logic of the pre-eminence of military considerations over and above all others, the land in the Military Border was subject to strict regulations aimed at precluding its fragmentation through alienation and, stemming from this, the possibility of breach and infiltration, which might weaken the effectiveness of the Border in its twofold function of frontier defence and pest control or *cordon sanitaire*. Consequently, immovable goods fell into two categories: *Stammgut* and *Überland*. The former, comprised of house, yard and land, was inalienable, that is, could not be sold, leased, mortgaged or given away.[31] The latter, less extensive than the former, was free of such constraints.

What set apart the situation of the *Grenzer* from that of the inhabitants of the civil Banat was the clearly defined system of dues and taxes. This in itself contributed to the comparatively enhanced social and economic status of the *Grenzer*, who, in terms of superiors, looked up only to the company and regiment authorities and ultimately to the Emperor himself. This became especially evident after 1779, when the civil part of the Banat was given back to the Hungarian Crown and subjected once again to the manorial system. This included the payment of *robot* dues to the noble or owner of the land, who also acted as judge and *ad libitum* dispenser of justice. In his description of the Transylvanian Border Regiments, George Bariţiu stressed the great difference between serfs, who were at the mercy of landowners, and the militarized population, subject to strict but 'concrete' laws.[32] Thus, in the Military Border, the introduction of unambiguous regulations regarding the amount of labour owed to state and community did away, to a considerable extent, with abuses and exploitation. At the very least this rigorously defined corpus of rules and regulations offered the legal basis for appeal in case such abuse did take place.

A second advantage of the system of labour dues, as well as a second point of difference when compared to the civil part of the Banat, lay in the use to which this labour was put. Thus, in the non-militarized part of the Banat, the *robot* contributed to the welfare of the landowner and presented no benefits for the peasant himself. In the Military

Border taxation and labour obligations were not implemented for the benefit of one individual or authority but were channelled towards maintaining and consolidating the infrastructure of Border communities: building roads, dredging rivers, draining swamps, erecting buildings for public use, etc.[33] The tax on land, commerce, industry and mills as well as the so-called exemption tax went into the *Grenz-Cassa* or Border treasury.[34] Moreover, the tax on land paid by the militarized population amounted to only half the tax to which civil inhabitants were liable.[35]

In 1779 the Banat of Temesvár was split into two: the civil part of the province was returned to the Hungarian Crown and divided into three counties (Temes, Torontal and Krassó), while the imperial military authorities retained the Military Border. The civilian part was divided into estates, which were sold off to the highest bidder. For instance, 40 villages of German colonists brought two million *Gulden* to the Viennese authorities.[36] Hungarian landowners, affluent Serbian and Romanian merchants and whoever else had enough money to buy up land became the new Banat landed gentry. This is how the Mocsonyis (Mocioni in Romanian), one of the prominent Aromanian families in Hungary, acquired land in the Banat. They were the descendants of Vlach merchants from Moscopole who had sought refuge in Hungary at the end of the seventeenth century following the sacking of the city by local warlords. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the family bifurcated into two separately ennobled branches (Mocsonyi and Mocsonyi of Foen), whose members, such as Andrei Mocsonyi (1812–1890) and Alexandru Mocsonyi (1841–1909), were involved in Hungarian politics and ecclesiastical debates. Alexandru Mocsonyi was to become the first president of the Romanian National Party in Hungary founded in 1869 and a supporter of the principle of a modus vivendi between the Romanians and other nationalities in Hungary.[37] Similarly, wealthy Aromanian merchants continued to migrate into the Habsburg Empire from Ottoman territories in search of personal security and trade opportunities. By the nineteenth century one of the wealthiest Habsburg subjects was the Aromanian Simon Georg von Sina, who owned land throughout the Empire and was the second richest banker in the Empire after the Rothschilds. His son increased

the family fortune by becoming involved in industrial and railway building projects.

Rivers and Modernization

Eighteenth-century economic and demographic policies implemented directly from Vienna had left their mark on the province permanently, so that well into the nineteenth century the same A.A. Paton could emphatically affirm: 'the Banat has not the least resemblance to the interior of Hungary [. . .] if a stranger were to have his eyes bandaged, he would suppose that he had been carried back towards the centre of Europe, instead of being nearer the Turkish frontier.'[38] Making the province financially viable inevitably meant modernizing it. Its main sources of wealth being agriculture and trade, the attention of the imperial authorities concentrated on the infrastructure of the land. Until the first railway lines were built between the Banat and the rest of the Empire in the 1850s, the only ways of transporting merchandise were waterways and roads. Roads had the advantage of being the faster option, but also the considerable disadvantage of being more costly for travel and subject to more restrictions in terms of the quantity of transported wares. By contrast, great quantities of mostly cereal could be shipped along rivers, which worked out cheaper for traders even though the journey was longer. And the Banat had rivers aplenty: the Maros and Tisza bordered it in the north and north-west; the Danube formed its southern frontier; to this was added a criss-crossing network of inner rivers – the Temes, Bega, Cerna, Caraş – none of which were navigable when the Banat was conquered by the Habsburgs, either because they were scant mountain rivers or because they ran across plains and bogged down into marshland.

This is where the new Habsburg authorities invested time and money: draining the swamps surrounding the city of Temesvár and making the Bega River navigable by building a canal and later on connecting it with the Temes River in order to control water levels. The works of regularization started under military administration shortly after the conquest and carried on after the retrocession of the Banat to the Hungarian Crown in 1779. The military command in Temesvár

continued to have a say in all matters related to the Bega and other waterways even if decisions now had to be made in agreement with the new county authorities. For the military, the Bega remained a strategically important objective on which depended the provisioning of troops in the Banat and, more importantly, those along the still-disputed Ottoman border. Once the Bega became navigable, cereal trade in the Banat was given a considerable boost. In 1750 a branch of the privileged imperial company Trieste-Rijeka opened in Temesvár, transporting cereals from the Banat to the Adriatic with a fleet of 24 ships. The route passed through Temesvár, along the Tisza, up the Danube, then on the Sava and Kupa rivers all the way to Karlowitz, where the merchandise was loaded into carts and sent to Rijeka.[39]

Plans to regularize the other two main rivers of southern Hungary, the Tisza and the Danube, were devised by the intrepid and visionary Hungarian modernizer, Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860), a descendant of an old aristocratic family and Hungary's second-greatest landowner. Having fought in the Napoleonic wars, Széchenyi then had the chance to travel widely across Europe and like many scions of Eastern European aristocracy got the bitter taste of an unfavourable comparison between his native country and the more advanced nations of Western Europe. Upon returning to Hungary he is said to have deplored this: 'Poor little fatherland, how filthy you are.'[40] He intuited that, if Hungary were to modernize, its trading routes and opportunities had to be improved and as rivers were the only routes for trade in bulk commodities, he started with them. He commissioned plans for a regularization of the Tisza. Works started in 1846 and ended four decades later, foreshortening the river by 40 per cent of its original length and rendering it flood proof.

The Danube was even more important than the Tisza as a transport artery for Habsburg trade: it connected Central European commerce with the Black Sea and, through the Straits, with the Mediterranean. The Habsburg lands needed this eastward opening both because they required oriental markets for the products of their budding industries, which were not competitive on Western European markets, and also because bulk trade benefited the economy of the predominantly agricultural Hungary.[41] In addition, the Danube was a potentially

important source of tax income. But as the taxation system, 'like the eyes of inferior animals, detected only the things that moved',[42] for a long time the Danube remained of negligible value. The reason for this was its precarious navigability and in particular the dangers it posed to shipping along its lower stretch in southern Banat. Downriver from Belgrade and until it reaches the Wallachian plains, the Danube bottlenecks several times in the stranglehold where the lower Carpathians meet the Balkans. Well into the nineteenth century this narrow stretch of the Danube was fragmented by rapids and dangerous rocks and to this day it is known in German as *Kataraktenstrecke* (waterfall stretch). Count Széchenyi, who donated the annual income of his estates to help found the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was the first to devise plans to regularize the Danube in the 1830s in an attempt to make the river navigable from Buda through to the Black Sea. The plans outlived him and took off in earnest once the legal status of traffic on the Danube was clarified as part of the peace treaties that concluded the wars shaking up the region in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century Ottoman rule had withdrawn from the Danube so that the Banat now bordered onto the Principality of Serbia and the Romanian Kingdom, both of them independent states following the Treaty of Berlin of 1879.

CHAPTER 5

ORTHODOX PEOPLES

Like many other Central and East European regions, the Banat had more names for peoples than there were peoples in it: Serbs, Rascians, Illyrians, Vlachs, Romanians, *Neubauern* or Roma, Germans, Suabians or *Schwaben*, Hungarians, Jews. The various names attached to them were those used in official classification, names they were known by or names they gave themselves. The Shakespearean question 'what's in a name?' does not have as easy an answer in the case of Central and Eastern Europe. Here, naming introduces relationships and, as such, is anything but innocent or transparent, even less so in a political-historical context, where the recognition of rights and bestowal of privileges are crucially dependent on a legal hermeneutics of names. It is not the names themselves that form the object of our interest in the next couple of chapters, but rather the political hierarchies they were a part of. Of the myriad of names above, the first five essentially designated only two ethnic groups, the most numerous in the land, and one religious denomination, the Orthodox. The present chapter will tell the story of how they came together under Habsburg administration, who they thought they were and what was the meaning behind their various names.

Classical Illyrians – the Old and the New

Viola: What country friends is this?
Captain: This is Illyria, Lady.

> *Viola*: And what should I do in Illyria? My brother he is in Elysium.

From Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mains Sales* (Dirty Hands), Illyria was a fictionalized land, where literary or political castaways played out their dramas. Illyria and Illyrians existed outside literature as well and had no less exciting lives than their fictional counterparts. A look at the semantics of the word reveals an unexpected number of shifting meanings. Ancient history and classical studies use the term Illyria and Illyrians to describe the region lying east of the Adriatic and its Indo-European population. Under the Romans the fluid territory of the Illyrian kingdom acquired stable borders and was known as Illyricum starting from the second century BC.[1] As the Oxford English Dictionary points out, the literary use of the term Illyrian is derived from this initial ancient history sense and as such designates entities 'pertaining to the regions lying along the East Coast of the Adriatic'. A more specialised usage is offered by linguistics, where Illyrian refers to 'the group of ancient dialects represented by modern Albanian' as well as to 'a division of the eastern branch of the Slavonic languages' (hence the distinction between Russian, Bulgarian, and Illyrian).[2]

The semantic metamorphosis of the term, which came to designate different political entities at different points in time, has been highlighted by various authors. Thus, in the mid-nineteenth century, Hippolyte Desprez counted at least three Illyrias: the ancient Roman province, 'a French Illyria, which had been planned by Napoleon since the Treaty of Campo Formio', and, finally, 'an Illyria that has no official existence, imagined by patriots with a view to uniting in one single moral entity the populations of Styria, Carniola, Carinthia, Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria'.[3] The last part of Desprez's triptych makes reference to the Illyrian Movement of the 1830s and 1840s, the school of thought advocating South Slav unity, whose main promoter was the Croatian scholar Ljudevit Gaj.

At the beginning of the twentieth century an Italian author, Mateo Giulio Bartoli, offered a more rigorous explanation of the changes undergone by the word Illyrian:

Very different spatial and temporal borders were ascribed to
the concept of Illyria as the name of a state or a province: the
ancient Illyrian Kingdom, then, during Roman times, the prov-
ince, the tax district, and the prefecture Illyricum, and finally
the Napoleonic *Provinces illyriennes* and the Austrian Kingdom
of Illyria.[4]

After the Roman institutionalization of the name, during the Middle
Ages it gradually fell into oblivion dwindling to a mere literary refer-
ence circulated in ecclesiastical writings. After a hiatus of several cen-
turies, the term acquired once again political meaning under Napoleon
against a background of neoclassicist flurry.[5] One last political entity
bearing the name of Illyria was the short-lived Kingdom of Illyria,
which came into being within the Habsburg Monarchy in the first
half of the nineteenth century.[6]

Of particular relevance for the semantic evolution of the word
Illyrian is a mid-seventeenth-century papal document which clari-
fies the term in an attempt to stem the flow of contention surround-
ing a fifteenth-century donation. Around 1453 the hospice of Saint
Hieronymus in Rome was founded on the basis of a papal donation
with a view to taking care of '*pauperum heremitarum Dalmatiae seu
Illiricae nationis*'. According to Bartoli,

> after repeated disputes over the interpretation of the name
> 'Illiricae', the Sancta Rota of 24 April 1656 issued the defini-
> tive judgment that as provinces of the Illyrian nation were and
> are to be understood Dalmatia or Illyricum, of which Croatia,
> Bosnia and Slavonia are a part, wholly excluded are Carinthia,
> Styria and Carniola, and only [people] originating in the said
> four regions, Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Slavonia can be
> admitted.

When considered from the perspective of Habsburg history, the
above-mentioned accounts evince one major blind spot: in between
the Roman and the Napoleonic times the term Illyrian resurfaced once
again as a political designation, this time referring to the Orthodox

immigrants from Turkish lands within the Habsburg Empire. This usage was, as we shall see further on, different from the ancient historical and classicist one preserved by humanistic writings and almost disjunctive with the seventeenth-century ecclesiastical interpretation as highlighted by Bartoli.

There is, thus, a distinction to be made between, on the one hand, the ancient historical meaning of Illyrian(s), which will have been a familiar enough name in cultured circles given its close association with Roman history (and, derived from this, the learned usage of the same term in loose reference to regions and peoples east of the Adriatic) and, on the other hand, the politically specific meaning of Illyrian as it surfaced in the Habsburg Monarchy during the eighteenth century: Empress Maria Theresa issued a Constitution to the Illyrian nation in the Empire, an Illyrian Border Regiment came into being in the south of the province in the mid-eighteenth century; between 1755 and 1777 there was an *Illyrische Hofdeputation* in Vienna. So what was meant by Illyrians and, most importantly, who were the Habsburg Illyrians?

Rascians into Illyrians

The Illyrian Nation was neither Illyrian nor was it a nation in the modern sense of the word. As we noted in the third chapter of this book, the late-seventeenth-century wars between Habsburgs and Ottomans turned the frontier between the two mighty powers into a tidal line advancing and receding with the fortunes and misfortunes of military campaigns. On account of one such reversal of military fortune (the Habsburg troops, having advanced as far as Belgrade, were beaten back across the Danube in an Ottoman counter-offensive), thousands of Serbs migrated into southern Hungary as part of what went down into history as the Great Serb Migration. In 1691 the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I granted them a diploma containing mainly religious privileges as an exceptional measure, confident that the Habsburg armies would oust the Ottomans from the Balkans and allow the refugees to go back home. That never happened and the Serbian refugees were there to stay.

The said privileges were nominally granted to the Rascians, which was the Serbs' immigration name in the Hungarian lands and had as such also been used in fifteenth-century articles of the Hungarian Diet. At that time the province of Raška actually existed and was the most powerful of the Serbian realms, the home of the Nemanjids, the Serbian dynasty that under Tsar Stepan Dušan conquered the better part of the Balkan Peninsula. The Habsburgs, taking over the Hungarian usage, were still referring by the same name to the Serbian population who had fled from Turkish territories north of the Danube and settled in southern Hungary. This was despite the fact that, by the seventeenth century, Raška, the Serbian medieval principality, had long disappeared from the map, and irrespective whether the incoming population was from the former territory of Raška or from some other Serbian-inhabited province. Rascian, therefore, was the name given by Hungarians, and later by the Habsburgs, to any Serbian population migrating from Ottoman-conquered territory.[7] This is not entirely dissimilar to some people nowadays (annoyingly) referring to the British Isles as England.

The privileges bestowed following the Great Serb Migration were assigned to all the communities of Greek rite belonging to the Rascian nation ('*Toti denique communitati eiusdem graeci Ritus et Nationis Rascianorum*').[8] The promises and dispensations enshrined in the Leopoldian charters were generous: preservation of language and faith, having their own religious leader in the person of a Patriarch who took his seat in Karlowitz, and also having their own secular leader, a Voivode. The religious stipulations were put into effect, the political ones were not.

Although the imperial privileges did not at any point use the name Illyrian, either as a synonym for Rascian or as an umbrella term for the Orthodox people, they did, nevertheless, constitute the legal matrix for a new political nation in the Habsburg Empire, the so-called Illyrian nation, which, by the middle of the eighteenth century, had come to designate the ethnically heterogeneous Orthodox inhabitants of the Empire. Thus, according to Johann Christoph von Bartenstein (1689–1767),[9] Vice-Chancellor under Maria Theresa and President of the *Illyrische Hofdeputation* (the Illyrian Aulic Office), the imperial

administrative body regulating matters related to the Orthodox sub-
jects of the Empire,

> ...under the name of Illyrian nation are to be understood, accord-
> ing to the privileges bestowed in 1691 by the gloriously remem-
> bered Emperor Leopold I, primarily three peoples: the Rascians,
> the Vlachs, and the Ruthenes, who are in certain respects very
> different from one another, but who are all of them Greeks and
> for the most part non-united.[10]

Although it is by no means clear how the transition took place from
the '*graeci ritus et Rascianorum Nationem*' of the Leopoldian privileges
to the *Illyrische Nation* of Theresian times, Bartenstein's 1761 study
*Brief Report on the Constitution of the Numerous Illyrian Nation Strewn
Across the Imperial Lands (Kurzer Bericht von der Beschaffenheit der in
k.k. Erblanden zerstreuten zahlreichen Illyrischen Nation)* throws some
light on the vagueness of the name Illyrian, which the author himself
would be instrumental in fixing into a new political entity, as he
contributed to the setting up of the Illyrian Aulic Council whose first
president he was. Bartenstein's study, moreover, represents the effort
at regrouping on the part of the Habsburg authorities faced with
Serbian discontent at the repeated infringement of their chartered
privileges.[11] Consequently, Bartenstein maps the legal precedents of
the Leopoldian privileges, tracing them back to the tax exemptions
granted by the Hungarian kings to the Orthodox peoples who had
fled from Turkish lands and sought protection in the Kingdom of
Hungary.[12]

Despite Bartenstein's postulation of the Illyrian nation as comprising
both the Vlachs and the Ruthenes, in practical terms this composite
nation did not exist. The setting-up of the Military Border regiments
in southern Banat testifies to the tendency of equating Illyrian with
Serbian or Rascian. Hence the distinction between an *Illyrisches* regi-
ment (including the Serbian settlements in south-eastern Banat) and a
Wallachisches Battalion (covering the Mehádia-Karánsebes area, which
was predominantly Romanian), or, subsequent to their merger, the
dual name of *Wallachisch-Illyrisches* Regiment.

Moreover, even from an ecclesiastical point of view Bartenstein's triad of peoples was not altogether watertight. Although equally named Vlachs, the Orthodox population of Transylvania was not included in the Illyrian nation and, as such, did not benefit from the Illyrian privileges.[13] As Bartenstein pointed out, unlike their Transylvanian counterpart, the Vlachs of the Banat were useful imperial subjects not only because they were economical ('they need little because of their many fasts'), but also because 'they are not burdened with any estates', that is, not subject to the nobility.[14] As for the Ruthenes in Bukovina (which, at the time when Barteinstein was writing his tract, was not part of the Empire), the Illyrian Privileges were never extended to include them.[15]

Given the apparently fuzzy boundaries of the word 'nation' in this context, a clear distinction should be made between its modern and pre-modern meaning. In this case 'nation' is used in its pre-modern, legalistic sense, as a set of rights and privileges and the beneficiaries thereof. The so-called *natio hungarica* or Polish nation of early modern times had the same limited meaning of membership of a set of privileges which had nothing to do with ethnic boundaries.[16] That this is also the case with the Illyrian nation is shown by the attempts made by the Transylvanian Orthodox, in reaction to the Union, to subordinate themselves to the Metropolitan of Karlowitz and, thus, to partake of the Illyrian privileges.[17] This goes to show that the Illyrian nation as conceived of within the framework of the Habsburg Empire referred to a collection of primarily *religious* privileges (the political stipulations of the Leopoldine charter were, as mentioned above, never put into effect) bestowed on the Serbs and extended to all the other Orthodox communities in Habsburg Hungary (bar the Transylvanian Orthodox), who were hierarchically subordinate to the Metropolitan of Karlowitz.

In this context, perhaps the most apposite description of the nature of the Illyrian privileges is that of Keith Hitchins: 'In the Habsburg Empire the Serbian Church was granted extensive privileges by Leopold I in 1691.'[18] Thus, it was not so much the 'nation', as we understand it nowadays, as the Church that received these privileges. In secular matters, however, the term Illyrian was unambiguously used to refer to

the Serbs of the Habsburg Empire as opposed to other ethnic groups. Ecclesiastically speaking, the Serbs, Vlachs/Romanians and Ruthenes in Habsburg Hungary were all Illyrians, that is, subject to the Serbian religious hierarchy and in this capacity entitled to the Illyrian privileges. As laymen, they remained ethnically distinct.

The protective umbrella of Illyrian privileges ensured the cultural and, in the long run, political development of the ethnic groups pertaining to the composite Illyrian nation. As we shall see further on in this book, Serbian pre-eminence in religious affairs was increasingly perceived as a burden by the Romanians, who in the nineteenth century broke ranks and rejected it, seeking to build their own national church hierarchy. As for the Serbs, the Illyrian Privileges created the conditions for a revival of Serbian culture and literature north of the Danube: the Serbs were granted their own printing house and confessional schools were founded in Karlowitz, the Orthodox Metropolitan See, in Temesvár and Neusatz. At the same time across the Danube, challenges were mounted against Ottoman rule in the Pashalik of Belgrade. Two great uprisings of the Serbs south of the Danube in the early nineteenth century turned the former Pashalik into the autonomous Principality of Serbia. Connections existed between the Ottoman and Habsburg Serbs even before this turmoil but during the uprisings they intensified and political refugees from the Ottoman lands found a safe haven among their brethren in southern Hungary. Once the fledgling Serbian state was established, the Habsburg Serbs continued to provide assistance, this time in the form of intellectual input. As A.A. Paton remarked, 'it was in the Illyrian schools of Karlowitz, Temesvár and Neusatz (Novi Sad) that the most efficient employees of the new Principality of Servia were educated, and from which the new Lyceum of Belgrade, now on the high road to become a university, received its professors.'[19] From the point of view of women's history, southern Hungary functioned as an intellectual nucleus with Novi Sad, Temesvár and Vršac as centres of learning where Serbian women's emancipation took off: it was in Novi Sad that the first Serbian woman to speak Latin in the eighteenth century lived; in the nineteenth century the first Serbian feminist, Draga Dejanović, came from the Banat; one of the first Serbian women poets, Julija Radivojević, was born

in Vršac; in 1906 Julka Hlapec-Djordjević was the first woman in Austria-Hungary ever to be awarded a doctorate.[20]

Wallachen

Sharing in the Illyrian Privileges alongside the Serbs, the Vlachs appeared as an ethnic community in the Habsburg Empire following the conquest of Transylvania from the Ottomans in the late seventeenth century. Prior to that, Byzantine and early medieval chronicles had mentioned at various points in time the Romanized population north and south of the Danube. Most generous in information on the north-Danube Vlachs and the source of the first attempts at writing a history of the people (mythologizing it in the process) are the works of Italian Renaissance humanists.[21] The myth launched by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, also known as Pope Pius II, to the effect that the term *Valahia* is a derivation of Flaccus, the Roman army leader sung by Ovid,[22] caught on and circulated in the works of leading humanists such as Antonio Bonfini and Sebastian Münster.[23]

Transylvanian medieval legislation contributed to the name of Vlach or Olah acquiring negative connotations. In 1437 a peasant revolt induced the Transylvanian nobles to close ranks and ally themselves with the Saxons and Székelys in the land. This alliance resulted in a pact, called the Union of the Three Nations, which was concluded in 1438. Strictly speaking, this was an alliance of the nobility against the rebellious enserfed peasantry. However, as most of the enserfed peasants in Transylvania were Vlachs, in time this political union led to the exclusion of Vlachs (on social, rather than ethnic grounds) from the political life of Transylvania.

Within Hungarian medieval historiography, the Vlachs acquired topicality and were seen to necessitate genealogical vindication whenever they formed the ethnic background to Hungarian nobility and royalty. Thus, during the reign of Matthias Corvinus, himself of Vlach origin after his father, the court chronicler Antonio Bonfini duly highlighted the noble Roman origins of the king.[24] The humanist Nicolaus Olahus, Archbishop of Esztergom, and a relative of John Hunyadi (Iancu de Hunedoara in Romanian), the latter being the father of

Matthias Corvinus, wrote at more length about his fellow Vlachs and their Roman descent.

The institutionalization of the negative sense of 'Vlach' came later, following the short-lived conquest of Transylvania by Prince Michael of Wallachia in 1599. According to David Prodan, subsequent seventeenth-century Transylvanian Diet decrees (the *Approbatae* and *Compilatae*) record this event as a before-and-after landmark for a differentiated treatment of runaway serfs, with the Vlachs being singled out for discriminatory measures:

> The Diet of 1667 decided that if the flesh of some stolen cattle is found on the precincts of some village and it is not clear who is to pay for it, it is the Romanian inhabitants of the village who should indemnify the loser, as robbery and thieving are widely spread among them.[25]

The status of the Banat population and the significance of the name 'Vlach' or 'Wallach' after the Habsburg conquest of the province in the early eighteenth century was not affected by those prejudices legislated by the Transylvanian Diet. Given the *neoacquisitum* status of the Banat and its uncompromising subordination to imperial authorities, Hungarian law as well as precedents of any sort (legal, political, proprietorial) had no bearing on this territory. As we shall see further on in this chapter, in the Banat the change from Vlach to Romanian came as a result of both internal developments and under the influence of the national movement of the Romanians in Transylvania.

The Vlachs in the Banat of Temesvár, or *Wallachen* as referred to by the Habsburgs, are given particular coverage in eighteenth-century *Landesbeschreibungen*, or descriptions of the land, commissioned by the imperial authorities with a view to the more effective administration of the province. Both Jakob Ehrler in his *Das Bannat von Ursprung bis jetzo* (The Banat from Its Origins until the Present Day), published in Temesvár in 1774, and Francesco Griselini in his 1780 essay on the political and natural history of the Banat (*Versuch einer politischen und natürlichen Geschichte des Temeswarer Banats in Briefen*) make a clear

distinction between the name of the population as given by the authorities and the one they themselves used:

> The Vlachs form the majority of the population. In their own language they call themselves Rumani, that is Romans, and they are truly the remains of the already mentioned colony transferred here by Emperor Ulpius Traianus. Their language has the greatest similarity to Latin, just as their clothes, customs, and food resemble the ancient Roman ones.[26]

The *Nationalisten*, that is, the communities that were already in the Banat by the time of the Habsburg conquest as opposed to the colonists, aroused the traveller's as well as the official's curiosity in seeming to live in a world beyond chronology. At the end of the eighteenth century, Johann Kaspar Steube, a Saxon in Habsburg military service, noted the way in which the Vlachs inferred their own age by reference to a series of episodes in the collective memory of the community:

> As their priests keep no birth records, the Vlachs never know how old they are. Therefore, if one asks an elderly Vlach how old he is, he will answer as follows: I was already a boy driving the cattle when the Turks were still masters of Temesvár, or, when they were digging the Canal, I was old enough to get married.[27]

The same remark is to be found in Ehrler's book under the title of Banat curiosities:

> The nationalist[28] cannot tell you how old he is. He approximates his age starting either from the time when Prince Eugene entered the country or when this or that battle took place or even when Temeswar or Belgrade were conquered and lost again.[29]

Romanians

Under the Habsburg monarchy the substitution of the name Vlach by that of Romanian has its roots in the early-eighteenth-century Uniate

terminological innovations. Uniatism was the attempt to bring the
Transylvanian Orthodox population within the sphere of the Catholic
Church through a union with the latter whereby the Orthodox recog-
nized the Pope as the head of their Church but retained their religious
customs. The need to dissociate the Transylvanian Uniate population
from those who continued to adhere to Orthodoxy led to the introduc-
tion, for clarifying purposes, of the phrase 'Romano-Valachus'. This
double name was resorted to, as Keith Hitchins points out, so as to
distinguish the Uniates among, on the one hand, the other nations of
Transylvania, and, on the other hand, the pool of Oriental Orthodoxy.[30]
However, this dissociation gradually acquired ethnic connotations in
the sense that the religious group it thus demarcated was seen to be
coterminous with the ethnic community:

> Uniate intellectuals looked upon their church as a Romanian
> national institution [. . .] and upon the union of the church as a
> reaffirmation of their Roman origins.[31]

What started out as a conjunction of two elements (*Romano-*, as in
the Roman Catholic Church, and *Valachus*, the name of the Orthodox
population in Transylvania), gradually transformed into a disjunctive
phrase in the philological and historical works of the Transylvanian
Uniate scholars, with the first element acquiring an increasingly more
patent association with the origins of the population rather than their
ecclesiastical affiliation.[32] The titles of Samuil Micu's books best illus-
trate this tendency of sidelining and, eventually, shedding the term
valachus and retaining only the first part of the initial Uniate tandem:
Historia daco-romanorum sive valachorum, *Elementa linguae Daco-Romanae
sive Valachicae* (1780). Moreover, the growing number of translations
into Romanian did away with the alien and, within a Transylvanian
context in particular, pejorative term Valachus and gave official cur-
rency to the in-group name.

   In the Banat the transition to the use of Romanian instead of Vlach
was initially effected as a didactic necessity. The educational reforms
of the latter half of the eighteenth century gave the name *rumân* a
quasi-official circulation through the translation into Romanian of

textbooks and teaching material. Thus, as early as 1769, a Romanian primer with Latin characters was published in Vienna under the title *Bucoavna pentru deprinderea pruncilor la cetanie în limba rumânească cu slovele ceale bătrâne rumâneşti* (*Alphabet book for accustoming children to read in Romanian with the old Romanian letters*)[33] as part of an eventually abortive undertaking by Daniel Lazarini, a jurist in Temesvár, who was commissioned by the Imperial Court to draw up 'an ABC *cum* reader for the Orthodox children'.[34] This initial project was followed by other, more successful ones, which resulted, after 1790, in a flurry of Romanian translations of primarily church books but also 'books of fables, manuals of craftsmanship and agriculture, and elementary schoolbooks and grammars'.[35] By 1831 Constantin Diaconovici-Loga, the director of the national schools in the Banat Military Border, was publishing a religious translation entitled *Viiata Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos Mantuitoriului lumii: Pentru indreptarea cresterii Tinerilor catra faptele ceale bune si ale Crestinatatii*, using throughout the name *roman* and the corresponding adjective *romanesc* without any further clarification of the type employed by the Transylvanian Uniate writers from the previous generation (i.e. the above-mentioned explanatory disjunction). In the educational sphere, where translations formed the essential scaffolding of the tuition process, the in-group name had, thus, become institutionalized. In all other matters, administrative, military and legal, the term *Wallach/-en* was still in use.

In addition to this and following the Transylvanian Uniate model, a series of philological and historical writings by Banat authors began to appear starting from the end of the eighteenth century, such as Paul Iorgovici's *Observaţii de limbă rumânească* (1799), Nicolae Stoica de Haţeg's *Cronica Banatului* (1825–27), Damaschin Bojincă's *Anticile românilor* (1832–33), and Eftimie Murgu's polemical, historical and linguistic tracts, to mention just some of the more memorable publications. These, too, added to the budding literature in Romanian and imparted further prominence to the term 'Romanian' at the expense of the centuries-old 'Vlach'.

It was not until 1848 that the process of name shunting, which had already been under way for half a century, was officially sanctioned

in domains other than the cultural-educational; that is to say, that the in-group name began to percolate official discourse outside the autochthonous sphere of cultural politics. Within a military context, the initiative came from the Transylvanian Border Regiments and was propagated to the Banat as confirmed by an 1848 report from the General Command in Temesvár to the Imperial War Council in Vienna:

> The General Command in Temesvár reports to the Imperial War Council that, as the Romanian Border Regiments in Transylvania introduced in their correspondence the name of Romanian, instead of *Vlachs*, the Command has accepted for the Border Regiment No. 13 the name of Romanian Banat Border Regiment and hereby asks for the superior sanction of the War Council.[36]

Approval was soon given so that, after a syncope of one year caused by the turmoils of 1848–49, the *K.K. Militär Schematismus*, the annual roll of the Habsburg army, lists for the year 1850 a *Romanen-Banater Grenz Infanterie Regiment* together with the corresponding *Romanen Siebenbürgische Militär Gränz Infanterie Regimenten*.

On a religious level, the gradual assertion of the name Romanian corresponds to a movement of dissociation of the emergent Banat intelligentsia from the Illyrian block, that is, from Serbian ecclesiastical hegemony. Habsburg educational reforms led to a nationalization of tuition in the sense of the introduction of national languages in schools. The process reverberated in the religious sphere, where it gave rise to demands that Old Church Slavonic should be replaced with the vernacular in religious service and that the Romanian Orthodox population should, moreover, be subordinated to a Romanian ecclesiastical hierarchy. In this context, the old name of Vlach was seen as the name of a population lumped together with the Serbs and playing second fiddle in religious terms. The adoption of 'Romanian' marked a movement of emancipation from inchoate, subordinate status under the protective, but stifling umbrella of Serbian religious hegemony enshrined in the Illyrian Privileges.

Nineteenth-century claims for national recognition on the part of the Banat Romanians were both a result of, and a reaction to, Serbian religious pre-eminence. It was under the protective umbrella of the Illyrian privileges that educational reforms, which would give an important boost to culture in the vernacular, were implemented to include the Romanian population of the Banat and it was in response to the newly perceived Serbian religious dominance that the budding Romanian religious and cultural life was to further develop. The long-term consequence of this process was that, with ever-growing national self-awareness on both sides, the Serbs and the Romanians of the Banat were to part ways as the nineteenth century wore on. One by one the labels used in reference to the population of the Banat (Vlachs and Rascians, in secular matters, and Illyrians, in religious) were gradually superseded by the in-group name of Romanian and Serbian. The affirmation of these terms corresponded to a change of cultural and political status of the respective communities within the framework of the Habsburg Empire and created the premise for new developments and further claims.

CHAPTER 6

THE PRIVILEGED AND
THE TOLERATED

The Habsburg Empire being a dynastic union of lands, each with its own set of laws, no principle of uniformity regulated the relationship between monarch and subjects or underwrote the bestowal of rights and privileges. This contributed to a seignorial type of politics, whereby, for pragmatic or religious reasons, one group of subjects was privileged over another, while others were merely tolerated. The present chapter looks at a further set of, this time economic, privileges, those given to the *Schwaben*, or German community in the Banat, in contrast to various degrees of legislated imperial discrimination regarding the Jews and the Roma.

I. The Privileged

In a recent extended interview, Herta Müller, a native of Nitzkydorf, a German village in the Banat, started her brief exposition of the history of Banat *Schwaben* with the nagging awareness of being one of them, yet constantly being mistaken for a Saxon, that is, a Transylvanian German: 'Those who know anything about Romania usually know of Transylvania. On hearing I'm coming from Romania, most people automatically think I'm coming from Transylvania. No one knows anything about the Banat; or that there are these two German-speaking regions, which have nothing to do with one another, either

geographically or from the point of view of the two German minorities to be found there.'[1] This, one can imagine, must be as irksome as it would be for an American to be constantly called an Englishman, or the other way around, just because they happen to speak English.

The Suabians or *Schwaben*, as the Germans in Southern Hungary are generically known, waxed and waned in the Banat with the fortunes of the Habsburg Monarchy. They arrived in several waves and left, or were driven out, in several more, within the time span of almost three centuries. Their colonization of the Banat in the eighteenth century was part of Habsburg imperial policies for the post-Ottoman economic recovery of the province. Their recruitment from across the territory of the Holy Roman Empire mirrored the economic as well as religious strategies of the Habsburg dynasty. Like their origins, their motives for coming to the Banat were different at various points in time. On the whole, the coming of the *Schwaben* changed the demographic face of the Banat and kick-started the economy of the place with manpower and expertise that proved to be the lifeblood of the new Habsburg province.

The Promised Wasteland

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the province the Habsburgs conquered from the Ottomans in 1718 was no Garden of Eden. With extensive marshland in between its criss-crossing rivers and their tributaries, plains inhabited by impoverished and fleeing populations, and thickly-wooded mountains which served as a den for outlaws and wild animals, the Banat was a fiscal wasteland that only years of colonization and careful state-supervised cultivation managed to turn into viable, taxable farmland. This was done primarily with the help of immigrants, mostly German, but also Italian and Spanish, chosen not according to language or ethnicity, but rather for their willingness to move there, their skills and, not least, for their perceived reliability as good Catholics or, the next best thing, Orthodox.

As the way to attract people anywhere is with the promise of a better life, the Habsburgs proceeded in the 1720s to campaign for the colonization of the Banat among the peasantry of the *Reich*, or Holy

Roman Empire. The generous terms offered insured the popularity of the campaign: the colonists were promised land in the Banat as 'free taxpaying peasants' (*freie Zinsbauern*); they would be bound to no local landlord or subject to any form of serf-like obligations; moreover, they would be granted three tax-free years to adjust to the new environs. The translocation between 1722 and 1727 came at the annual price of 10,000 Florins incurred by the imperial authorities. These had first made sure that the lands to be colonized were not likely to be claimed back by any previous landowner: they made any retrocession conditional on producing written evidence of ownership, which, after 164 years of Ottoman rule, was not likely to happen.[2]

Contrary to what their name might suggest, the German colonists that came to the Banat were not from the German region called Swabia, but rather from all over the Holy Roman Empire. The various German-speaking families became *Schwaben* at the end of the long journey down the Danube to the Banat. The colonization experience welded them together and levelled out some of the initial differences. One of the hypotheses concerning the origin of the name is that they came to be called *Schwaben* because the starting point of their Danube voyage had been at Ulm in Swabia.[3] Another, less convincing explanation claims that *Schwaben* (*sváb* in Hungarian, *svaba* in Serbian) was a generic name, ever since the Middle Ages, for German colonists from the Baltic to the Balkans (with the exception of Transylvanian Saxons and Hungarian *Zipser*).[4]

The first spate of reconstruction and colonization in the Banat of Temesvár was not without success, not least because it took place under the supervision of astute military commanders. As for almost two centuries (sixteenth and seventeenth) the possessions of the House of Habsburg stretched all the way across Europe (from Spain to Hungary, from Flanders to Croatia and northern Italy), its armies brought together military of equally variegated ethnic background. The mastermind behind the conquest of the Banat in 1716 had been the French reject Eugene of Savoy and, continuing the military theme, the first two governors of the new province were General Florimund de Mercy (1666–1734) and, after him, the Scottish General Andreas Hamilton (1679–1738). It was under their command that the reconstruction of

the Banat began and the first waves of colonization that would pump new blood into the province were set in motion. And the results were not long in showing.

By 1735 the German settlers were able to pay 30,000 florins' worth of annual tax, which covered the colonization expenses incurred by the Habsburg authorities.[5] The land was tested for productivity, crops were tried out, wild fruit trees were grafted, mulberry trees were planted to promote sericulture (silk worm growing) and guarded upon pain of death ('he that dares cut them, shall be hanged', as a Banat chronicler noted). Master craftsmen manned the newly established manufactories, paper and textile factories in Temesvár. Skilled miners were colonized to the mountain regions. Builders and carpenters accompanied the imperial engineers in the restoration of fortresses along the banks of the Danube. On *Neu Orsova*, the strategic Danube island overlooking Orsova, fortifications were erected by the Habsburg military authorities with a view to staving off a possible Ottoman invasion across the Danube. In later years the island fell to the Ottomans, who repossessed themselves of northern Serbia, renamed the island Ada-Kaleh (Fortress Island), and proceeded to colonize it with Muslim population. In the Banat the work of reconstruction continued. The old Roman baths and healing hot springs in south-eastern Banat, which had fallen into disrepair and been hitherto known only to mountain inhabitants, were rediscovered and restored to their former glory by General Hamilton's craftsmen and engineers. The best preserved Roman statues discovered there were sent off to Vienna to decorate the imperial library.[6] The remaining traces of the former Roman greatness of the place are still in place to this day and have been attracting scholars and *dilettanti* ever since.

The More, the Wealthier

The achievements of the first upsurge of imperial administrative energy in the Banat were all but obliterated by the ill-starred war against the Porte between 1737 and 1739. Once the convulsions of the Seven Years' War were over, Empress Maria Theresa could turn her attention to her Hungarian provinces, and in particular to the

Banat of Temesvár. The loss of Silesia to the Prussians had dealt a major blow to the Habsburg Monarchy not just in terms of prestige but also economically. Silesia had been the richest, most prosperous of Habsburg hereditary lands and its vital importance to the imperial economy had to be compensated for by fostering industry, raw material extraction and commerce in the remaining Habsburg lands. The reconstruction of the Banat of Temesvár, which had in the meantime become a borderland following the latest Turkish war, served this very purpose. And, in keeping with the Mercantilist economic philosophy of the day, which placed the prosperity of a state in direct relation to its number of subjects, this was done, once again, by means of colonization.

For a second time since the conquest of the Banat, imperial messengers (some recruited from among the old settlers) were sent out to entice a fresh wave of colonists into the land. The terms offered to the newcomers by the Theresian authorities were even more advantageous than those offered previously under the reign of Karl VI: the settlers enjoyed six years' tax exemption, they received hereditary rights over their plot of land, and had strong houses built for them. This amounted to a long-term loan granted to the colonists in the hope that in six years' time they would prosper, pay their taxes and make it all worthwhile. The policy was not without its critics, some of the Banat imperial officials preferring to forego the risks and expenses involved in a second colonization and, instead, rely on the steady and certain profit derived from taxing the autochthonous Serbian and Romanian shepherds.

Perhaps the best illustration of the dispute surrounding the benefits and downsides of colonization is to be found in the *Banat Chronicle* (*Cronica Banatului*), where the author, Nicolae Stoica de Haţeg, a young Orthodox priest from Mehádia, remembered Joseph II's visit to southern Banat in 1768. The Monarch was interested in the newly militarized villages, which were to form a new segment of the Habsburg Military Border. Having heard that he was about to arrive, the people from a number of villages in the Almăj Valley took to the woods for fear they might be made soldiers and sent abroad. Stoica, who served

as interpreter for the Emperor during this visit, noted an exchange sparked off by the news between the Joseph II's companions, General Lacy and Lieutenant Schlegel:

> Seeing that the Emperor was displeased, Lacy said to him: 'Your Imperial Majesty, this unfaithful people should be removed from the country or entirely rooted out and in their stead should be brought faithful Christians, [. . .] good workers, accustomed to the mountains.' [. . .] Upon which, Lieutenant Schlegel, as Papilla's head engineer, said to Lacy: 'Your Excellency has uttered divine truth that the people from Styria, Tirol, and Carniola work in the mountains and are accustomed to them; but in order to bring them here, one has to build them houses and give them utensils, cattle, and wagons. And, since they are used to eating well and sleeping on soft pillows, one will have to build strong houses for them up in the mountains, make them straw beds, and give them all sorts of victuals. [. . .] Whereas these past two years I have seen what these poor and simple Romanians take with them when stationed on the cordon: whether summer or winter, they have the same thing, maize flour bound up in a sheep's stomach. [. . .] And for sleeping, they have no cover but their woollen cap and in the winter they sleep outside by the fire.'[7]

The autochthonous population were therefore a much hardier and less demanding lot than the German colonists and, as such, better suited to the rough conditions of the frontier, as well as being less expense, if not less trouble, for the imperial authorities. Brought into the Banat upon the promise of definite economic privileges, the Suabian peasants were, by contrast, keenly aware of their rights and willing to defend what they considered to be their due. Well into the nineteenth century, long after the civil part of the Banat had been transferred to the Hungarian Crown and Hungarian landlords, as opposed to the Habsburg Aulic Chamber (*Hofkammer*), were in possession of the land, the German peasants were described as obstinate, independent and so litigious that there was even a proverb about them among the landed

proprietors, 'As many Suabians, so many court cases'.[8] Having arrived in the Banat on a contractual basis as privileged colonists, the *Schwaben* had decades of practice in the art of official complaint and used their *Beschwerderecht*[9] (right to complain) to signal to the imperial authorities the infringement of their rights or any other problems that got between them and the promised prosperity.

Joseph's Protestant Colonization

Under Karl VI and Maria-Theresa settler recruitment was restricted by religion. Only Catholics were accepted as colonists (hence the apparently strange ethnic combination of Germans from the western parts of the *Reich*, Italians, Spaniards and some Czechs). The only exception to this all-Catholic colonization pattern were the Orthodox (Bulgarians and Armenians), for whose faith there was already a precedent of imperial toleration in the form of the Illyrian Privileges. Protestants, however, were excluded and it took the 1781 Religious Tolerance Decree (*Toleranzpatent*) issued by Joseph II after his mother's death to open the door to Protestant immigration to the Banat.

Protestant colonists arrived in Hungary and the Banat mainly from Württemberg, where failed crops and endemic indebtness made the prospect of emigration appealing, and also from Pfalz, or the Rhenish Palatine (a region in western Germany), where policies of re-Catholicization drove many Protestants to estates in Hungary owned by Protestant landlords or by pragmatic Catholics.[10] Late in the eighteenth century, while travelling through Hungary, Ernst Moritz Arndt encountered a *Schwaben* family on their way to their place of colonization and, upon asking their son where they were going, the answer came: 'To Paradise'. This encounter led Arndt to comment on the attraction of the Hungarian East to these starry-eyed German colonists: 'These poor Suabians often go to Hungary as colonists, and dream of golden mountains there.'[11]

The reality of colonization was much more pragmatic. Starting with Joseph II, while religious limitations were completely eliminated, qualitative restrictions were imposed on who could apply for emigration: a certain sum of money was required as a precondition to emigrating

to insure that the colonists could maintain themselves until the first crop; additionally, a much more careful selection process was initiated so that only the fittest and most skilled applicants would be granted permission to move to Hungary. If in the previous waves of colonization, the emphasis had been on numbers, by virtue of the Mercantilist principles of government in force at the time, Josephine colonization stressed agricultural productivity and the skilled labour conducive to it, an economic vision directly influenced by French physiocrats.[12]

Ploughshare Conquerors

Most studies on the Danube Suabians, or *Donauschwaben*, as the Germans in the Old Hungarian Kingdom came to be called after World War I, agree that the colonists were seldom totally destitute or impecunious when they decided to emigrate. They were in search of a better life and were able, both physically and financially, to achieve this by moving to the Habsburg-conquered Hungarian lands, which at the time represented a scaled-down, European version of America. The German fascination with the East had its roots in the first, medieval spate of German colonizations which had brought the Saxons to Transylvania, the *Zipser* to northern Hungary and Germans to the Baltic regions.[13] But while medieval colonizations were driven by military considerations (various ethnic groups were stationed along the borders of the Hungarian Kingdom as guards against attacks from the east), the early modern, Habsburg colonizations were economic in character and sought to bring to Hungary people who were not so much good with their sword, as with their plough.

　'*Nicht mit dem Schwerte,/ mit der Pflugschar erobert,/ Kinder des Friedens, Helden der Arbeit*' (Conquerors not with the sword, but with the ploughshare, children of peace, heroes of labour).[14] This is how a local church inscription presented the *Schwaben* and it was not mere self-aggrandizing praise. It reflected the self-image of a community who had braved the hardships of resettlement, the adverse climate, the epidemics and wars of a new land, while well aware of their important role in the economy of the place. Suabian village monographs record the ravages of the first years of settlement, with entire communities almost wiped

out by cholera. Deriving from this generational experience, Suabian proverbs and poems convey both the spectre of death and the hard work that allowed the community to endure and prosper: 'The first has death, the second has need, and only the third has bread for his lot' (*Der Erste hat den Tod, der Zweite had die Not, der Dritte erst das Brot*)[15] or 'Labour was our only trait and the little field we ploughed was our world' (*Arbeit nur war unser Element, das Stückchen Feld das wir bebauten unsere Welt*).[16] Irrespective of whether this self-image was a result of colonial experience proper or was also influenced by the Josephine restrictions on the third great wave of Habsburg colonization, with its emphasis on a prospective colonist's ability to work and prosper, industry and hard work remained a defining identity trait for the *Schwaben*, cherished by the community and recognized by outsiders. Even after the horrors of World War II pitted one ethnic community against another and waves of emigration were set in motion which depleted the German community in the Banat, the proverbial Swabian industriousness lingered on in the collective memory of the place for generations to come.

II. The Tolerated

The Useful Jews

While colonization was feverishly under way and the Habsburg authorities seemed unable to get enough people to turn around the economy of the place and thus fill the coffers of the imperial treasury, there were religious limits to Habsburg Mercantilism and the generosity practised to entice tax-paying subjects. The Jewish communities which had settled in the province under the Ottomans starting from the seventeenth century were allowed to remain in the land by the new rulers, but under strict conditions and close supervision. Their presence was tolerated and even turned to account, but under the clear injunction that the community should not increase its numbers.[17]

Even though religious restrictions appeared to run against the economic interests of the province, the Habsburg authorities were not

going to lose money because of them. Quite the contrary: as early as 1698, a tolerance tax (*Taxa tolerantiali Judaeorum*) was introduced under Leopold I, which was developed under Karl VI and Maria Theresa.[18] This allowed a number of Jewish families, mostly merchants, to settle in the towns of the province and ply their trade. The taxing of groups deemed 'unreliable' but useful included Greek merchants from Ottoman lands, who similarly had to pay a *Griechentoleranz* tax.[19] It is small wonder that by the middle of the nineteenth century the wealthiest bankers in the Habsburg lands were Jewish and Greek/Aromanian (the Rothschilds and the Sinas respectively).

The Jews filled in the gaps of the new economic structure of the province and, despite the religious constrictions, the Habsburgs had to fall back on the skills and commercial prowess of their non-Christian subjects. Of necessity, the German Commercial Society (*Deutsche Kommerziensozietät*), set up in Temesvár in 1723, came to include Jewish merchants in addition to Germans. At a time when the available supplies of water were undrinkable, the much prized and jealously guarded franchise for brewing beer and burning spirits was granted initially to Jewish bidders, for lack of Christian competitors and despite stipulations by the *Hofkammer* that the lease be given to Christians, even if that meant collecting a lower rent.[20]

Under the reign of Maria Theresa a *Judenordnung* (Jewish Decree) was issued for the Banat of Temesvár in 1776, which regulated Jewish affairs in the province, from the number of families allowed to reside in Temesvár to their economic, social and religious organization. Perhaps the most intrusive aspect of the Theresian ordinance was the religious injunction that the two Jewish communities, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, should merge into one. The authorities thus aimed to streamline what was essentially a heterogeneous community into a unified group with one leadership which could be easily supervised and dealt with.[21] The state-driven amalgamation of disparate communities on the basis of a common, religious denominator did not target only the Jewish communities. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, an Illyrian nation had already been postulated by Habsburg authorities to comprise the Orthodox communities in the Banat (mostly Serbian

and Romanian) so that the state could jointly deal with their affairs and thus avoid inefficient administrative fragmentation.

Respite from previous restrictions on the Jewish community came with Joseph II's accession to the Habsburg throne and his *Systematica gentis Judaicae Regulatio* (Regulation regarding the Jewish people). This act lifted most of the professional interdictions placed on the community (Jews could, for instance, be apprenticed to Christian craftsmen and could enter guilds) but in the name of state centralization and smooth administration, it also tampered with traditional ways and practices of the Jewish community: Hebrew remained the language of religious practice only, while in legal and administrative matters, the Jews had to use German, Latin or Hungarian, any documents drawn up in Hebrew or Yiddish (the Jewish variation of German, although written with Hebrew characters) being declared null and void.[22]

On the whole it appears that although the Habsburgs' relationship with their Jewish subjects started as one of grudging toleration, by the nineteenth century it had turned into a mutually beneficial one. Up until the Tolerance Tax was removed, retaining their Jewish subjects turned out to be a very lucrative business for the Habsburgs, who extracted from a comparatively minute Jewish community almost the equivalent of the annual tax paid by the much more numerous and imperially pampered *Schwaben*. Because of the initial impositions on professional choice, the Jews of necessity developed a tradition in the field of commerce and finance, which turned out to be one of the mainstays of governmental projects implemented by the imperial authorities in the nineteenth century. In the Empire as a whole, this was recognized in the form of ennoblements awarded to what we nowadays call 'businessmen' (merchants, industrialists, bankers): a fifth of these went to Jews.[23]

Squaring the Circle of Nomadic Life

Modern state bureaucracy does not take well to migration or to elusive, unaccounted-for populations. We see it every day on the news and we may have run up against it ourselves in filling in endless forms to obtain a visa somewhere. It was no different with the nineteenth-century

Habsburg monarchy, which was slowly trying, though not quite succeeding, to coalesce into a centralized state: land surveys, conscriptions, statistic descriptions, imperial reports, all served to convey as comprehensive an image as possible of the Habsburg possessions and their subjects and to extend the hold of the state over an increasing number of people and their activities. While even the most remote villages were at one point or other visited by the taxman or the imperial cartographer, traditionally nomadic peoples like the Roma constantly eluded the grasp of authorities and, despite official attempts to pin them down and render them sedentary, continued their peripatetic existence.

Just as there was a *Patent*, or decree, regulating the affairs of every other group of subjects in the Empire, a *Haupt-Regulativ* (imperial regulation) was issued also for the Roma, or *Zigeuner*, in 1783. This stipulated, among other things, that local authorities should clamp down on makeshift Roma settlements in the woods and transfer them to agricultural communities, where they could cultivate the land; roaming was prohibited except for certain occasions when the Roma were provided with special passes, and begging was to be kept to the minimum necessary for subsistence; they were not allowed to keep horses for selling purposes and were liable to corporal punishment for eating the flesh of fallen cattle (*das Fleisch gefallener Tiere*) and using their own language; they were instead to adopt the language and style of dressing of the community in which they lived, have their houses numbered and stick to their name. As the nineteenth-century ethnographer Karl Czoernig remarked, for all these imperial prescriptions, a great majority of the Roma population in Hungary remained faithful to their nomadic life style and roamed free or only temporarily settled on the outskirts of villages in clay or timber huts, under bridges, in woollen tents, plying their anvil and fiddle, soothsaying or begging.[24]

For all their restrictive nature, the Josephinian prescriptions regarding the Roma were comparatively progressive in the context of their times. They were directed at a population who was legally free (the Roma from the newly acquired province of Bukovina were released from slavery at the same time), whereas in the neighbouring Danubian Principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia, they continued to be slaves

until 1856. The 1783 Habsburg decree thus represented the best the imperial authorities could do to reconcile state centralization with the fluid way of life of their nomadic subjects. Less than satisfactory as these regulations may have been then, as they are now, one cannot easily finger-wag even from the vantage point of our own 'emancipated' times, for to this day the European Union is yet to find an unanimous answer to the phenomenon of nomadism.

What the revolutions of 1848–49 would try to achieve was an equality of rights for all the subjects of the polity as well as a legal framework which would limit the hitherto unchecked powers of the monarch as well as those of the landed gentry, reducing the degree of arbitrariness implicit in the selective bestowal of privileges and the restrictions placed on less favoured communities. As we shall see in the next chapter, the great challenge of pursuing equality was that the actual translation into practice of the concept differed from one social group to another and from one ethnicity to another. As it turned out, most of those who clamoured for equality did so with an ascending gaze: they wanted equality with their peers and superiors, not with the underlings.

CHAPTER 7

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF REVOLUTION

Befreite Völker sind nicht dankbar, sondern anspruchsvoll.
Liberated peoples are not grateful, they are demanding.

(Bismarck)[1]

Preliminaries to a Failed Revolution

1848 went down into history as the year of the most widespread and, in the short term, least successful of revolutions. France, the German and Italian lands, the Habsburg Empire, and the Danubian Principalities were briefly convulsed and shaken from their very foundations only to subside, most of them in a matter of months, into renewed conservative order. Once the Pandora's box of revolution burst open, social and political demands surged forth helter-skelter, testing loyalties and forging unlikely alliances. The upheaval pitted one class against another and revealed the mutual antagonism of self-asserting nations. The 'Springtime of Nations', as the revolution came to be called, showed the peoples of Europe to be a conglomeration of conflicting and irreconcilable interests: the proverbial spring of 1848 was not a Vivaldian harmony of liberated peoples, but rather a spasmodic, deeply riven dissonance of incongruous aspirations reminiscent, rather, of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring.

The European economic depression of the late 1840s in conjunction with a number of specific local grievances and concerns (limited franchise, failed crops and rampant unemployment in France, local elites disgruntled with Austrian rule in Italy, calls for constitutions, national representation, extension of franchise and abolition of serfdom in the Habsburg lands, economic reforms and constitutional monarchy as respectively demanded by workers and middle-class liberals in Prussia), all these helped generalize revolutionary preconditions across the best part of Europe. What made the revolutionary spark spread like wildfire, however, was the cultural infrastructure that had developed in the big cities of Europe: newspaper circulation, coffee-house informal forums, secret societies, the newfangled telegraph, steamboat and railways.

As pointed out by Eric Hobsbawm, the hardest to suppress were the revolutions in the Habsburg dominions (Hungary and Italy), that is, in those places where social and constitutional claims were tangled up with demands for national recognition and independence. Where national complications were absent, the revolution was drowned in blood because of fear: the fear was that of liberals at the spectre of social revolution (the classic case of the middle classes wanting equality with their betters, but not with the proletariat rabble); the blood was that of workers and the town poor. France provided the best example of this with the June massacres and the ensuing proclamation of a conservative republic.[2]

The Habsburg Empire over which the 1848/49 revolution swept was perhaps little more than a collection of entailed estates, as A.J.P. Taylor memorably put it, consisting of a patchwork of diverse provinces that shared the same monarch: the Habsburg hereditary lands (roughly covering present-day Austria, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Polish Galicia), the Hungarian Kingdom (made up of what one would nowadays recognize on the map as Hungary, Slovakia, parts of Romania and Serbia, that is, Transylvania and the Banat of Temesvár) and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venice in the northern Italian Peninsula. By 1848, the Habsburg Emperor had been shorn of his prestigious title of Holy Roman Emperor (the Holy Roman Empire was formally dissolved in 1806), though not of his pre-eminence in the affairs of the German Confederation. This was a loose association of German statelets that came into being at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 on the ruins of the old Empire. After the territorial and

political upheavals of the Napoleonic period, the European conservative powers closed ranks and pledged to maintain a strict balance of power that would prevent anything like it from ever happening again. Strict absolutism and censorship were the order of the day, an order that would collapse in 1848 under pressure from the street.

Brave New World

The stiffest resistance put up in the Habsburg dominions was that of the Hungarians, who had been chafing at the bit ever since the Habsburg conquest of Hungarian territories from the Ottomans, unhappy with Habsburg rule and their centralization policies. As soon as news of Metternich's fall in Vienna reached Budapest, the ferment of revolution seized the Hungarian capital and from there snowballed, sweeping over the whole of Hungary. Hungarian flags were hoisted on public buildings or sported as revolutionary cockades by enthusiastic youth; assemblies formed, where all those present were declared equal and given the right to vote and elect deputies to the new Hungarian government; and programmes containing demands under several points were drawn up and forwarded to the imperial authorities. The basic demands were for fundamental civic freedoms such as the end of censorship, freedom of speech and assembly, trial by jury, constitutional rule, equal political representation and abolition of social servitudes; the mood was high and hopeful as the breakdown of conservative order across Europe gave the people the illusion that they could now take their fate into their own hands and forge a more equitable world.[3]

But 'the people' were never the people in the singular and equality meant different things in different quarters of Hungary. The multi-ethnic character of the Hungarian Kingdom (made up of less than 50 per cent Hungarians outnumbered by a composite population of Serbs, Romanians, Slovaks and Germans) superimposed national cleavages and claims on top of the social ones. This led to a much more complex revolutionary movement in the Hungarian lands deriving from an atomization of criss-crossing, conflicting interests and resulting in a stalemating of consensus. The Banat of Temesvár provides, in this context, the best litmus test of the conundrums of the Hungarian revolution.

The Banat on the Eve of Revolution

A traveller through the Banat of Temesvár making his way from north to south in the late 1840s would be going through a land of contrasts governed under two different administrations: a civilian province, divided into three counties (Temes, Torontal and Krassó) administered from Budapest, and a girdle-like militarized territory stretching along the south-eastern frontier and run directly by the *Hofkriegsrat* (Aulic War Council) in Vienna. In the Hungarian counties of the Banat, our traveller would journey through the large estates bought at imperial auction, half a century earlier, by moneyed Serb, Hungarian, and Macedo-Romanian (Aromanian) merchants and entrepreneurs. The land was worked at the time by a diverse peasantry, speaking half a dozen languages and, according to the Banat Urbarial Patent of 1780, divided into three categories: serfs, colonized and contractual peasants.[4] Envied for their free status and unhampered by manorial corvées, the militarized peasants of the Border, or *Militärgrenze*, knew, by contrast, no higher authority than their regimental officers and the Emperor himself, and paid for their privileged status by performing frontier guard duties and military service during war time. Different segments of society in the Banat owed their prosperity, or lack thereof, to one government or another (the frontiersmen to the imperial authorities in Vienna, the colonized *Schwaben* to the Hungarian ones in Budapest). Some, such as the Serbs, enjoyed religious privileges but felt that these did not go far enough and political rights should follow them; others, like the Romanians, enjoyed no privileges of their own and wanted to have as much as their co-religionists.

House of Mirrors, or the Limits of Equality

Myriads of proclamations were circulated in Hungary as part of a domino effect which started on 15 March 1848 in Budapest. Three days later the revolutionary programme had reached Temesvár and in early April county officials across the Banat were being removed from office and replaced by revolutionary authorities. The initial euphoria brought together people of all walks of society and of all nationalities.

Attempts were made to maintain order in the land and apprehensive thought was given to a possible peasants' revolt. An order from Budapest dated 2 May 1848 urged the new authorities to inform the peasants of their liberation from servitude, to present this as an initiative of the landowners themselves, and to make sure the peasants went back to work so that no crops should fail, lest the ensuing hunger should lead to an uprising.[5]

What the revolutionaries in Budapest did not count on when they disseminated their liberating programme to the peoples of Hungary was that, in doing so, they set an example for other ethnic groups. In the Banat of Temesvár, they gave hopes of political emancipation to the Serbs and Romanians. And indeed the initial idealistic message of brotherhood and social equality did not seem to exclude such a possibility. But as the devil is in the details, so the brotherly union of peoples was to break into a thousand factions over the details of how the emancipation of one nation should coexist with that of another. Thus, each nation found their stumbling block in another's claims, in what was an odd but predictable play of mirror-image political programmes whereby one revolution was out-revolutionized by another.

The first to encounter their nemesis were the Hungarians. And, in the Banat of Temesvár, they found it in the form of Serbian claims. Just as the Hungarian liberals would have their kingdom carved out of the Habsburg Empire, either as an autonomous province or, as the radicals would have it, as an altogether independent country, the Serbs in their turn bid for their own autonomous territory within Hungary under separate, Serbian administration. Their demands for the use of the Serbian language in conducting public affairs were the spitting image of Hungarian demands for official use of their own language, instead of the German imposed from Vienna. Having had their demands rejected by Lajos Kossuth, the radical Hungarian leader, at the Diet of Pozsony (Bratislava) in May 1848, the Serbs regrouped at the metropolitan see in Karlowitz under the leadership of Patriarch Rajačić and enunciated their own, separate twelve-point programme: they would have a national territory by the name of Vojvodina, comprising Syrmia, Baranja, Bačka, the Tchaikist (Danube flotilla) battalion, the Kikinda district in the Banat as well as the Banat Military Border; they would

moreover have the actual *voivode*, or military leader, that the old Illyrian Privileges stipulated but that had never been granted to them; last but not least, the thus-created Vojvodina was to be politically united to the Kingdom of Croatia, Slovenia and Dalmatia.[6] The Hungarians, however, would have none of this. Emancipation of Hungarians from Austrian rule was the limit of their vision of equality.

The Serbs themselves were not spared the *mise en abîme* of their revolutionary claims and had their religious hegemony challenged by the Romanians, who were now distinctly asking for emancipation and a church hierarchy of their own. Moreover, the Vojvodina postulated by the Serbs was to incorporate the Romanian Banat Border Regiment, which extended Serbian territory well beyond the extent of their ethnic community. The Serbs were not as adamant as the Hungarians had been in rejecting rival claims: the Patriarch welcomed the idea of an emancipated Romanian nation and even urged them to form their own autonomous territory, headed by a Ban, or governor, recruited from among the Border officers. Whatever promises were obtained from the Serbs during the Karlowitz congress, they never materialized in any official documents and religious emancipation was never granted.[7] That was the limit of Serbian and Romanian strivings for equality.

Peasant Reactions

The peasants were notoriously difficult to mobilize in all the countries swept by revolution. In Prussia, with the exception of parts of the Rhineland, rural protests rarely went beyond local concerns, nor did they amount to 'a principled challenge' to king and state. If anything, the peasantry, in particular that of the provinces east of the Elbe, remained loyal to the besieged Crown.[8] In a France steeped in agrarian crisis, the peasantry opposed the Republic, cast a conservative vote in the April elections and bought into the governmental propaganda about marauding 'bands of communists'.[9] In the Italian lands, the Austrian imperial authorities found their staunchest allies in the local peasantry, who stood to gain nothing from a revolution made by what they regarded as their oppressors, the Italian landlords. In

the Austrian province of Galicia (nowadays straddling south-western Ukraine and south-eastern Poland) the 1846 attempt of the Krakow nobility to rally the peasantry around the flag of Polish nationalism and incite them to rebel against Austrian rule notoriously backfired with the oppressed peasantry turning instead against the Polish nobility and massacring hundreds of them in what went down into history as the Galician Slaughter.

In Hungary in 1848, while the gentlefolk and townsmen were locked in revolutionary debates, redrawing internal borders, negotiating with imperial authorities and squabbling over concepts of liberty and equality, the peasant in the field got wind of the new laws and his free status in translation more often than not. The first seeds of mistrust between the peasants and the new authorities were sown upon detection of translation mistakes in official documents: thus, in the county of Krassó, the serfs complained that the Romanian text of the laws was not faithful to the Hungarian original.[10] Moreover, as the revolutionary authorities failed to deal with peasant complaints regarding old injustices and land litigation, the peasants proceeded to rectify them single-handedly: they occupied pastureland and forests and, where social tensions ran particularly high, they sacked manor houses and violently resolved old rivalries and abuses. Just as the Russian imperial authorities would have to drive home to their peasants, when serfdom was officially abolished in 1863, that they still had to buy their land back from the landowners, so the Hungarian revolutionary authorities in the Banat had to spell out the terms of the peasants' liberation: they now owned their land but they were still expected to work that of their landlord for a given salary. And as an indication of how little had changed in peasant-landlord relations since the Habsburg conquest of the Banat, the Banat peasants still referred to their landowners, more than a century later after the end of Ottoman rule, by the old Turkish name of *Sipahis* (*Spăhie*).[11]

The already problematic relations between the peasants and revolutionary authorities were further soured by the forced military recruitment of young peasants into the newly set up Hungarian national guards. This, as well as the hollow promises and dilatory responses to land-related grievances, led to the peasantry clamming up in sullen

mistrust and refusing to be swayed either way. As one of the witnesses of the 1848 revolution in the Banat remembered years later, when asked whose side they were on, the peasants would answer: 'we're on our own side'.[12]

Choosing Sides and its Conundrums

By the time Lajos Kossuth proclaimed the Hungarian Republic in April 1849, the nationalities of Hungary had grouped into two warring camps like the poles of a magnetic field: the Hungarians supported by some of the *Schwaben* fought against the Austrian imperial army, which was buttressed by an all-Slav *confrère* of Serbian and Croatian forces allied with Romanians. The concessions elicited from the Habsburgs by the Hungarians in early 1848 created two centres of administrative and military power:[13] the teetering Viennese authorities, who would only find their feet with the accession of Franz Joseph to the Austrian throne in December 1848, and a confident Hungarian *Ministerium*, which claimed full control of Hungary and its troops and confusingly issued decrees in the name of the Hungarian King. While the authority of the Hungarian *Ministerium* was never fully recognized by the troops of the Banat or of Hungary as a whole, a part of the armed forces in Hungary did act on orders from Budapest. Some were fully convinced by the Hungarian cause, others remained *kaisertreu* (loyal to the Emperor) but followed military orders issued by the Hungarian authorities in the name of the Hungarian King. With parallel orders from Vienna and Budapest, troop commanders had to make the fateful decision as to which ones to follow. At the end of the war, when supreme military command had been once again unified, this decision would spell the difference between promotion and the gallows.

Selling Snow to Eskimos

In his description of Hungary, John Paget remarked on the rationale and organization of the Military Border: initially set up as a buffer-zone-cum-cordon-sanitaire against the Ottomans, by the

nineteenth century the Border seemed to have outlived its func-
tion and, stretching as it was all around south-eastern Hungary, it
struck Paget as more suitable for keeping the Hungarians in than
the Turks out.[14] As it was controlled directly from Vienna and its
frontiersmen enjoyed a privileged status, the Military Border was a
precious reservoir of manpower loyal to the Habsburgs. The revo-
lutionary Hungarians were well aware of this and tried to coax the
frontiersmen onto their side. A special declaration was issued to
them by Kossuth himself: they, who had been doomed to military
service for ever and were robbed of their citizen rights, who were
tied to the land and whose nationality had been suppressed by sub-
ordination to German laws and German commanding officers, were
now being offered the boon of the Hungarian revolutionary govern-
ment and its emancipating laws. They would henceforth be free citi-
zens, entitled to send representatives to the Hungarian *Ministerium*
and freely elect their local officials; they would have full possession
of their land and be free to dispose of it as they saw fit; they would
be released from *robot* dues and manorial burdens (*grundherrlichen
Lasten*) and the state would finance education and schools in their
own language.[15] However generous and high-minded the Hungarian
offers were, they nevertheless fell on deaf ears and this was because,
with a few notable exceptions, they were essentially holding out to
the frontiersmen benefits they already enjoyed. The address as a
whole was a thoroughly miscalculated move: it underestimated the
imperial loyalty of the militarized population, it showed a certain
ignorance of their already privileged status, and, by granting rights
the frontiersmen already had, it contradicted itself and made the
imperial authorities look good.

As a result, in the Banat Military Border the Serbian frontiers-
men sided with their co-nationals in what would become a fierce civil
war, which raged from the summer of 1848 until the final defeat of
the Hungarian troops in 1849. The Romanian frontier communities
declined the offers of participation in the new government formed
by the Hungarian revolutionaries, calling their bluff while upholding
their own status as staunch supporters of the Emperor. As a number of
extant reports show, for some Border communities, almost 100 years

of direct rule from Vienna and close military connection with the
Emperor were not going to be easily brushed away by an alien govern-
ment, however revolutionary:

> The expression of dissatisfaction with the new order of things
> and with the introduction of the Hungarian Ministerium showed
> most clearly among the population [...] they unanimously
> stated that, as long as they did not see the Emperor himself and
> did not hear from his very mouth that he did not need them any-
> more, they would not give credence to any of these discussions
> and proclamations.[16]

And the report is not singular:

> In the presence of myself and Lieutenant General Korniz the
> assembled communities of the Corniac Company stated that,
> given their proved loyalty and submission to the Imperial House,
> they could not understand how they could be handed down to
> the Hungarian Ministerium and they would not break their
> loyalty to Emperor and King; at this, Corporal Ianku Ionescu
> and frontiersman Ianku Stoloschesko, in particular, applauded
> on behalf of both communities. [Stoloschesko] even said, how
> did they think they could justify themselves if the Emperor held
> them responsible for their gullibility [...] they demanded even
> to go in person to His Majesty to check if it was true that His
> Majesty wished to hand them down as orphans to the Hungarian
> Ministerium.[17]

For all these determined stances, confusion reigned in the Banat Border
as well as in the rest of the country. One of the most fierce and pro-
tracted battles in the Hungarian civil war centred on the little town
of Weißkirchen (Fehértemplom) in southern Banat. Here the mostly
German, but also Romanian population, being completely thrown by
the conflicting legality of the warring parties (both sides were fight-
ing in the name of one and the same monarch), in vain wrote to the
Emperor for a clarifying sign:

Your Imperial Majesty,

> until recently one was used to seeing Your commands and laws,
> which were announced by our superiors, put into practice with-
> out any opposition; the population of these communities com-
> peted with one another in proving their loyalty and submission
> to Your Majesty, and the authorities announced and fulfilled,
> unanimously and undivided, the laws decreed by Your Majesty.
> All this has of late completely changed and the old order of
> things and security no longer exist. [...] What in one place is
> just and lawful is considered treason in another place and, do
> one as one may, one breaks Your Majesty's laws while fulfilling
> them. [...] Your Majesty, we only need one word of Yours to
> put an end to this uncertainty, which is the root of all confu-
> sions. Those that lead and organize the rebellion act in the name
> of Your Majesty just as those who acknowledge the authority of
> Your Hungarian Ministry. One side must thus be usurping Your
> Majesty's sacred name.[18]

An imperial answer seems not have been given and the town of
Weißkirchen ended up on the Hungarian side under the fierce siege
of the Serbian troops. Months of attacks and heavy artillery failed to
bring down the little maverick town in the Banat Military Border.[19]

All-Out War

The sweeping concessions granted by the disarrayed Austrian govern-
ment to the Hungarian Ministry in the spring of 1848 were reversed
upon Franz Joseph's accession to the throne, in particular those regard-
ing military and fiscal prerogatives. Seeking to put an end to the civil
war raging in Hungary and bring the country to heel, the imperial
authorities instituted martial law across the Empire and, allied with
the Croatian military forces led by Ban Jelačić, marched into Hungary
in autumn 1848. What followed was a drawn-out war punctuated
by reciprocal atrocities. In the Banat, the Serbian violence of earlier
that year was visited on Serbian communities by advancing Hungarian

forces and, conversely, Hungarian peasants revolted at the looting and killings perpetrated by uncontrollable Croatian soldiers. Letters sent by officers from both sides confirm the extent of the gratuitous, hate-driven destruction perpetrated by wild troops that not even the threat of punishment could hold back any more.[20] The Hungarian forces, relying on volunteers and troops conscripted from among the peasantry as well as on makeshift weapons hastily bought or made using Hungarian treasury money, put up a strong resistance and for a while made a mockery of Austrian attempts to seize control of Hungary. They were, however, outnumbered and their makeshift Honvéd army was no match to the trained Austrian army. Apart from that, as the conflict progressed, the Hungarian troops had to withstand attacks from the imperial forces as well as from the discontented nationalities in Hungary. Moreover, following a number of defeats at the hands of the Hungarians, the Austrians swallowed their pride and asked for military support from the Russian Tsar. Whether Russian help was actually needed to decide the fate of the war is a matter of interpretation.[21] The fact of the matter remains that the war was fought to the bitter end on both sides.

The city of Temesvár, defended by loyalist imperial troops, held out under siege for 107 days. Shortly after the end of hostilities, A.A. Paton visited the bomb-scarred Temesvár, where there was not a single house untouched by artillery; the damage was so extensive that he had difficulty finding decent accommodation. He remembered looking in vain 'for the noble alleys that used to be the delight and ornament of the place; all had been hewn down by the grim axe of war, the fortifications covered with the marks of cannon-balls, and the roofs of the houses within battered to the bare rafters, or altogether roofless.' The sight of sheer urban destruction gave the Scottish traveller and diplomat for the first time in his life 'a full and complete conception of the "horrors of war"'.[22]

Paton thus proceeded to piece together, on the basis of survivors' stories, one of the most violent episodes in the history of the city. The commander of the besieging Hungarian troops, Count Károly Vécsey, decided against a breach-and-storm manoeuvre and chose instead the more inhumane strategy of a protracted bombing campaign. What

the bombs failed to destroy, the typhoid and cholera finished off: 'The fever began to rage in the town, and on the 25th of July a quarter of the garrison had perished, a quarter was in the hospital, a quarter ailing and unserviceable, and only a quarter all efficient; and on that day alone five surgeons died of typhus. [. . .] In spite of the exertions of the fire-engine corps, one edifice after another fell a prey to the flames. To the conflagration of a large convent of the Merciful Brothers, which served as a temporary hospital, succeeded that, on the night of the 30th of July, of the two baracks at Peterwardein gate, when the firemen exhausted by twelve hours' previous exertions, allowed the whole mass to burn to the ground. [. . .] The hospital was not only full, but in such a state that the air was pestilential, the sick and wounded preferring to remain without surgical assistance, to entering the hospital.' And, as a leitmotif for the entire war, for a long time the besieged city fought in utter ignorance of 'whether Vienna was still the capital of the Austrian Monarchy or of a social and democratic Republic'. Scant information, acquired by means of spies and ruses, fuelled hope among the survivors of the decimated fortress that the fate of the war had turned and friendly imperial troops were close at hand.[23] The besieged Temesvár was finally relieved by an imperial army corps led by General Haynau, whose name was to become infamously associated with the ruthless reprisals following the end of the war.[24]

Exemplary executions of commanding officers were conducted in Arad in northern Banat at the end of the war, which only added to the collective trauma of the hostilities and further embittered Austrian-Hungarian relations. Thirteen generals of the Hungarian Honvéd army – among them also Károly Vécsey, the besieger of Temesvár – were garrotted in the fortress of Arad on 6 October 1849, a national day of mourning in Hungary ever since. The provenance of the martyred 13 tragically showcased the divided loyalties which caused the civil war to rage with such violence. Although they were all generals in the Hungarian army, not all of them were ethnically Hungarian. János Damjanich, a Serb from southern Hungary, was celebrated by the Hungarians as a great general and reviled by the Serbs as a traitor; General Karl August Graf zu Leiningen-Westerburg belonged to an old noble family with a long military tradition from southern

Germany, was married to a Hungarian, had constitutional and liberal leanings and only learnt Hungarian during the war.[25] The 1848 revolution and war found him and his cousin in opposite camps. By the end of the war, one Leiningen was promoted and the other was garotted. The war did not just pit one nation against another but also members of the same ethnicity and even the same family.

Gratitude and Punishment

A paraphrase of the Bismarckian motto which opened the present chapter would be an apposite description of the outcome of the 1848–49 revolution in Hungary: 'restored monarchs are not grateful, but authoritarian'. Once order was restored, the young Emperor Franz Joseph wrote off all the legislation issued by various revolutionary authorities for the past two years and instituted a tighter, more centralized form of absolutist rule than had been the case before 1848. As a much quoted observation pointed out, apart from the harsh military executions that concluded the war, there was not much difference in the treatment of those subjects who fought against or for the Emperor: 'we (the Croats) received as a reward what you (the Hungarians) were given as a punishment'.[26] All provinces of the Empire were levelled out and demoted to the status of crown lands. Even the apparent concessions made to revolutionary creations such as the preservation of Serbian Vojvodina were pro forma only and lacked any autonomous powers.

Between 1849 and 1860 a new crown land emerged by the name of the Serbian Vojvodeship and the Banat of Temesvár (*Die serbische Wojwodschaft und das temeser Banat*), which preserved the territorial changes made by the revolutionaries only on the face of things. The new administrative unit was granted a Voivode as well, just as the Serbs had always demanded. This, however, was none other than the Habsburg Emperor himself, who thus attached yet another dignity to the panoply of offices traditionally qualifying his imperial name. An Austrian governor ran the Vojvodeship from Temesvár until 1860, when the neo-absolutist regime in Vienna started to relent in the face of external and internal pressure. The Emperor retained the title of

Grand Vojvode even after the administrative unit disappeared and the Serbs, for their own part, retained the illusion of Vojvodina as a separate province within the Habsburg Empire. The blueprint for it was already there in the minds of Serbian intellectuals and it would lie dormant until another great historical upheaval reactivated it and translated it into reality. Each time, however, that a Vojvodina appeared on the map, it had different boundaries and served different needs than its predecessors.

The Railways of Neo-absolutism

When it comes to modernization, authoritarian regimes have always had the upper hand over liberal ones, as things that require consent take longer to get done than those that are simply decreed and forced through. Less than ten years after the revolution, the Banat got its first railways as part of a spate of post-revolutionary economic development, which benefited from the iron hand of the neo-absolutist regime that had the Habsburg Monarchy in its grip until 1860. On the territory of the Monarchy railways started to be built in the 1840s, with a time lag of 20 years compared to Britain and the United States, but on a par with similar developments in the German lands. In the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy the first railways were built in the mid-1840s by the Hungarian Central Railway Company (*Magyar Középponti Vaspálya Társaság*) and initially linked Pest with Vác and Szolnok. Count István Széchenyi, who, as pointed out in one of the previous chapters, had pioneered plans for the regularization of the Tisza and the Danube, was also among the most fervid promoters of railways in Hungary. In 1847 he provided an additional locomotive for the maiden journey along the Pest-Szolnok stretch so that the distinguished guests (among them two Habsburg archdukes) could take note, upon their arrival in Szolnok, of the progress made on the regularization of the Tisza.[27]

Following the revolution of 1848–49, the Hungarian railway company was taken over by the imperial authorities and turned into the imperial South-Eastern State Railways (*Die k.k. Südöstliche Staatsbahn*). The authorities proceeded to finish off the tracks begun by the

Hungarian company and build new ones, in particular along the strategic southern Hungarian border. A look at the map of the Habsburg railways in the nineteenth century shows a conspicuous concentration of tracks in the Banat region as opposed to the expanse of the Great Hungarian Plain. There were two reasons for this disparity. One was a military-strategic rationale, which urged that the Austrian Military Border segments should be better connected with the imperial centre (previously the best maintained roads in southern Hungary were, similarly, those to be found on the territory of the Military Border). The second reason was economic: here, just as across Europe as a whole, the earliest railways were for coal transport and served the mining industry in the mountains of the south-eastern Banat. The Crimean War provided an additional impetus for the building of portage railways in the Banat: tracks were constructed to connect the Danube port of Bazias with the mining town of Oravitza in 1856 and with Steierdorf-Anina in 1863.[28] This in turn gave a boost to the local metallurgical centres such as Reschitza, not unlike the development of industry in the Czech lands and the Ruhr region following the construction of the first German railways.

In terms of railway building the Habsburg lands were decades ahead of their easterly neighbours. Romania started building railways from 1865 onwards. Serbia, the Monarchy's newer neighbouring state south of the Danube, inaugurated its railway company as late as 1881. The gap between the coming of the railways in these three countries indicated the amount of mediation and political meddling involved in the process: until 1867 the Habsburgs did not have to ask for anyone's permission (not even that of the Hungarians) to build their railways. The Romanians needed another decade to do the same in the wake of political turmoil: within the time span of less than 30 years the Romanian Principalities, while still under nominal Ottoman suzerainty, exchanged foreign protectorates (Russian after the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829, and Great Powers tutelage after the Crimean War, 1856), so that reforms, political as well as economic, no longer needed the approval of the Porte (the Ottoman central government). Serbia, however, although becoming autonomous within the Ottoman Empire in 1817, still had to seek the agreement of the Porte for projects such

as the building of railways. Proposals to put into place a railway that would connect Belgrade to the Adriatic were drawn up throughout the century and repeatedly rejected by the Porte, who had their own plans of infrastructure modernization, which however circumvented Serbia.

The privatization of the Habsburg railways in the mid-1850s and the creation of the *Staatseisenbahn-Gesellschaft* (State Railways Company) was one of the signals that the imperial authorities were starting to feel the pinch of their post-revolutionary authoritarian policies. The deteriorating financial situation in the Monarchy compelled the imperials to sell the state railways to private owners and, as we shall see in the next chapter, also induced them to start political negotiations. Authoritarianism in the Habsburg lands was itself getting privatized.

CHAPTER 8

CITIZENSHIP AND CONSTITUTIONALISM 1867–1918

Money and Constitutions

Less than 20 years after the 1848 revolution was suppressed and centralizing absolutism had levelled out all the provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy, constitutionalism and political representation were being introduced across the Empire peacefully, almost as a matter of course, with none of the convulsions that accompanied the latest revolution. Absolutist rule had indeed restored order but proved a burden in the long run, because it was financially unsustainable. External developments in particular brought home to the Habsburg Emperor the necessity of cajoling his capital-possessing subjects into a mutually beneficial alliance with the Crown: Austria's decision to stay out of the Crimean War left it politically isolated while the lost wars against Italy (1859) and Prussia (1866) not only dealt a blow to its military prestige and its status in the German Confederation, but also fatally depleted its treasury. By 1860 absolutism was forced to admit to its own bankruptcy and attempts were made to create consultative assemblies that would open the floodgates of capital.[1]

After a failed experimental interlude which gave the imperial subjects a constitution and a parliament based on a very narrow and

unequal franchise, the Empire was eventually divided in 1867 into two autonomous polities known as Austria-Hungary, bound together by a number of common institutions and owing allegiance to the Habsburg Monarch. With internal affairs completely separate (each of the two halves of the Monarchy had its own parliament, a government led by a Prime Minister and its own administration and legislation), what welded the country together was foreign, commercial and military policy, which came under the jurisdiction of a number of common commissions (or *Delegationen*) recruited from both halves of the empire.

From 1867 onwards the political and constitutional life of the Banat of Temesvár, which was situated in the Hungarian half of the Monarchy, was closely linked to that of Hungary and conditioned by Hungarian law and administration. The reshuffling of the Empire did not only draw an administrative fault line between the Austrian lands and Hungary, it also removed all traces of particularism and composite rule, at least in the Hungarian half of the Monarchy. Thus, although Croatia was recognized as a separate kingdom, it was going to stay so as an integral part of Hungary; the Military Border, running all the way from Croatia to the Banat and governed directly from Vienna, would be gradually dissolved over a period of ten years starting from 1872 and eventually reverted to Hungarian rule. For the first time in more than 100 years, the Banat of Temesvár was once again under a single administration. Together with the civilian inhabitants of the province, the Banat frontiersmen joined the ranks of Hungarian citizens. For the new constitutional era also brought in a new status for Banat subjects: from now on they were to be Hungarian citizens, with all the advantages and disadvantages that the concept entailed. The old connection with Vienna was thus permanently severed.

Citizenship

With the advent of constitutionalism in Austria-Hungary, concepts of citizenship (*Staatsbürgerschaft*) and citizen rights (*Staatsbürgerrecht*) replaced the old fuzzy notion of *Völker,* or peoples. In Hungary,

prior to 1867 there existed the notion of *populus*, which designated the nobility only, and that of *plebs*, or non-nobles, who were subjects of the Hungarian Crown. There was also a third category, that of *honosság* (*Landesangehörigkeit*), which remained ambiguous in its reference, given that the acquisition of *honosság* entailed entry into the nobility class. With the constitutional transformation of 1867, Hungarian *állampolgárság* (citizenship) superseded the old concept of *honosság*, thus extending its civic scope to the entire population. However, while socially all-inclusive, the new legal category was at the same time more politically restrictive than the previous one: whereas the *honosság* brought with it political rights, the newly created *állampolgárság* was essentially a passive civic status, devoid of political rights.[2]

The *Ausgleich*, or settlement, of 1867 resulted into two bodies of legislation: one affecting citizens belonging to the kingdoms and provinces represented in the *Reichsrat*, or Austrian parliament, ('*alle Angehörige der im Reichsrate vertretenen Königreiche und Länder*'), that is, the Austrian provinces, the Czech lands and Polish Galicia; and another one regulating Hungarian internal affairs, including Croatia and Fiume.[3] As a direct consequence of this, two types of citizenship came into being: an Austrian and a Hungarian one, both of them based on *jus sanguinis*. Thus being born to Austrian or Hungarian parents was decisive in determining citizenship. Even though internationally, the Dual Monarchy acted as a unitary whole, the split citizenship (Austrian and Hungarian) was never merged into one.

What these radical transformations in the fabric and organization of the Empire meant for the inhabitants of the Banat of Temesvár differed from one social stratum to another: the great landowners now looked to enter the bicameral Hungarian parliament as members of one of the numerous political parties that mushroomed in Hungary after 1867 or as independent MPs; the peasantry had been reduced to a common denominator in that they were all free of servitudes and serfdom, although the new status did not erase the economic differences accumulated in a century and a half of rural cleavages; the fledgling middle class was split along national lines and, as we shall see further on, struggled with the new political restrictions stipulated by the Hungarian electoral law.

Hungarian Parliamentarism

In Hungary, the *Ausgleich* brought into being a bicameral Parliament, with a House of Lords drawing its members from the aristocracy, and a House of Representatives elected on a limited franchise that allowed some non-nobles and members of non-Hungarian nationalities to enter Parliament. The initial split of the Hungarian ruling class into a Constitutional (*Felirati Párt*) and a Resolution Party (*Határazati Párt*) dated back to the first constitutional era of the early 1860s and illustrated two fundamental attitudes regarding the relationship between Hungary and the Habsburg Crown. The Constitutional Party, later called the Deák Party after the architect of the Hungarian settlement, Ferenc Deák, saw the future of Hungary as lying within the Habsburg Monarchy and sought a modus vivendi with the Habsburgs. By contrast, the Resolution Party, which later split into an independence party and a '48ers party, sought either a restoration of the April 1848 Hungarian revolutionary legislation or fully-fledged independence. New formations such as the Catholic People's Party (*Katholikus Néppárt*) and subsequent splits and mergers in existing parties resulted into a panoply of political groupings dominated in later years by the Hungarian Liberals (*Szabadelvű Párt*).[4]

Partaking in the new political opportunities and pursuing their own specific goals were the various parties of the nationalities, which started forming in the Banat from the late 1860s. These followed a two-phase pattern of development: cultural, religious or economic associations sprang up initially, which, as they grew and acquired more adherents, eventually formalized into actual political parties. The period of parliamentary constitutionalism ushered in by the *Ausgleich* was something of a second coming for the leaders of the non-Hungarian nationalities in the Banat, as for their counterparts in the rest of Hungary. The new settlement resuscitated part of the legal framework conceived in the 1848 revolution and recreated, with a difference, the national relations and claims of the revolution: just as in April 1848, post-1867 Hungary enjoyed an autonomous status (this time granted by the Habsburg monarch through negotiation, rather than wrenched from him in the fire

of revolution) and built for itself a liberal-constitutional political edifice. Having suffered the austerity of the neo-absolutist regime imposed from Vienna side-by-side with the Hungarians, the non-Hungarian nationalities now ditched their hopes for imperial intervention and saw their chance in the new parliamentary system of Hungarian politics.

Politics in the Banat: the first flush of parliamentary optimism

After the revolutionary years, when a flurry of utopian projects divided the Habsburg Monarchy and the Balkans into imaginary federations (some headed by Hungary, others envisaged under the suzerainty of the Porte, still others patterned on the Swiss model) hopes waned, in the second half of the nineteenth century, for a collaboration between the peoples of south-eastern Europe. Consequently, the various ethnic communities of the Habsburg Empire sought to adapt and pursue their goals within the existing state.[5]

This was the case of the Serbs in the Banat and southern Hungary. Their leader, Svetozar Miletić, embraced Hungarian parliamentarism and promoted a rapprochement between the Serbs and Hungarians. By doing so, he was leaving behind – in sheer disappointment – the traditional hallowed reverence for the Habsburg Emperor, who was not in a position to fulfil Serbian claims for autonomy within the empire (in 1860 the Serbs' promised land Vojvodina would be reincorporated into Hungary after its short-lived existence during the 1848–49 revolution). He pinned his hopes instead on the Hungarian parliamentary arena, where he thought liberal principles would allow for national claims to be successfully pursued.[6]

High hopes were cherished, too, by the Romanians of the Banat, who following the 1865 elections sent representatives to the Hungarian Parliament. In Budapest they formed a Romanian parliamentary club under the leadership of Andrei Mocsony, a prominent member of an ennobled family descended from Macedo-Romanian merchants who had sought refuge in Hungary at the end of the seventeenth century and subsequently settled in the Banat. Just like Miletić, Andrei

Mocsony supported a closer collaboration with the Hungarians and placed his trust in the new parliamentary system.[7]

The Serbs and Romanians of the Banat had to part ways religiously in order to meet again in political union. Romanian religious claims for an independent church hierarchy had caused friction and disagreement between the two peoples during the 1848 revolution. The 1860s would provide a solution to Romanian grievances in the form of a complete separation from the Serbian Church and the foundation of an all-Romanian Metropolitan See in Hermannstadt (Sibiu), to which the Romanian dioceses in the Banat were now affiliated.[8] Religious disentanglement was encouraged by political representatives, with Svetozar Miletić actively supporting the Romanians' claims for separation and Andrei Mocsony for his own part making sure that moderate financial claims were pressed by the Romanian side in order not to sour relations with the Serbs unnecessarily.[9]

Membership of the Club of Nations

The protean concept of nation has given rise to an impressive number of theoretical studies seeking to explain the shifting membership of groups thus designated. As a political label, until the eighteenth century the term 'nation' referred to a minority of the population, formed mainly of the landed aristocracy, irrespective of ethnic origin. In this sense the nation was by no means coterminous with the people but rather functioned as a badge of identity for the rich and powerful in the land (as in the case of the Polish and Hungarian nations) or as membership to a set of privileges (as in the case of the Illyrian nation). In the nineteenth century, challenges were made to monolithic structures of power in an attempt to widen the circle of political participation and decision-making. So the concept of nation was gradually opened out to encompass whole ethnic communities, not just their privileged leaders.

For a long time debates over nations and political representation animated the educated middle and upper classes of nineteenth-century Hungarian society. At the unsophisticated grassroots level, however, ethnic labels were more often than not used as shorthand for social

categories. Thus, a description of Hungarian-Romanian relations in the Banat of Temesvár on the eve of the 1848 revolution explains the essentially social rationale behind what appeared to be ethnic friction:

> . . . the Romanian from the Banat hated the Hungarian because he did not see Hungarians who were like himself nor did he see any Romanians who were like the Hungarian. He knew them [i.e. the Hungarians] only as Hungarian nobles and these were for the most part either landowners or high officials and, naturally, he did not love them because they taxed, judged, punished and ruled over him. So they said the Hungarian ruled over everything.[10]

In the Banat, moreover, the German term *Nationalist* had been used by the eighteenth-century Habsburg administration in reference to the autochthonous population, Serbs and Romanians.[11] It was also used in Bukovina, 'with an apparently similar meaning to denote a representative of the local population.'[12] By 1869 the term 'nationalist' was still being used in the Banat but its meaning had shed its original Illyrian ambiguity, that is, it no longer signified a representative of the *natio Illyrica* but rather a representative of one given ethnic group (Romanian or Serbian), although a commonality of political purpose was still evident in it. The semantic specialization of the word comes across in Antoniu Mocsonyi's invitation to a national conference in Temesvár issued on 20 January 1869 in the following terms:

> Given that the elections date is drawing near, I, acting upon the right that every genuine constitution must grant its citizens, and also answering the challenge that several nationalist gentlemen proposed to me, hereby take the liberty of inviting the distinguished national intelligentsia, or, in the case of those living in far-away regions, their trustworthy representatives and the representatives of the people, to a brotherly public assembly and conference in Timişoara on 26 January 1869.[13]

That the word nationality had, by then, become synonymous with the ethnic group or *Volk* is attested by Vincenţiu Babeş's speech to his voters in Sânt-Nicolaul-Mare, Torontal County, following the 1869 parliamentary elections, where for rhetorical purposes the speaker glosses the term:

> I have had occasion to admire your good understanding, zeal and solidarity, irrespective of nationality, Serbs or Romanians, and irrespective of confession, Uniate or non-Uniate.[14]

By the mid-nineteenth century, the transition from an exclusivist, narrow meaning of nation to a broader, ethnically connoted one was well under way, but a typical feature of this transition was the coexistence of both meanings, which corresponded to two competing political visions. The representatives of the various ethnic groups in the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy were locked in just such a battle for defining the nation.

The National Limits of Liberalism

The short-lived honeymoon of Hungarian parliamentary politics was rudely interrupted by the controversial Law of Nationalities (*Gesetzartikel* XLIV) of 1868. Contrary to the multi-ethnic reality of Hungary, the new law subsumed all nationalities into the Hungarian nation.

> [A]ll citizens of Hungary, according to the principles of the constitution, form from a political point of view one nation – the indivisible unitary Hungarian nation – of which every citizen of the fatherland is a member, no matter to what nationality he belongs.[15]

This provision constituted the bone of contention for all subsequent interpretations and implementations of the law. There were polemical reactions to it such as that of the Romanian MP Sigismund Borlea:

> . . . as regards the observation made by Mr MP Smeskal against the word nation, I would point out only this, that it should be

taken into consideration that the law and its article, whereby we are decreed Hungarians, was not issued with our consent but against our will. And he must know, surely, that not only nations, but also individuals, who are herded somewhere by force always crave to escape. One can even say that if it were possible for living people to be forcefully driven into Heaven, they would most likely try to escape just because they were forced into it.[16]

There were also attempts at reaching a compromise between the two principles of state unity and equality of rights, stipulated by the law. One was Svetozar Miletić's concept of 'federal dualism', which presupposed state unity combined with regional autonomy.[17] The Romanian MP Alexandru Mocsonyi 'was ready to accept even that all citizens formed one political nation' provided that 'all the other nations should be recognized as such within this unique nation'.[18] Commentators have repeatedly pointed out, as the main source of controversy, the language-bound ambiguity of the term 'Magyar', which was used in reference to both the Hungarian political nation, including all the other nationalities, as well as to the Hungarian linguistic and cultural community, and which eventually constituted the legal premise for a policy of Magyarization.[19]

By comparison, in the Austrian half of the Monarchy nationality legislation did not form a separate law, but constituted a passage in the general law on citizen rights. Article 19 of law 124/1867 postulated no overarching, least of all 'unitary and indivisible', political nation of the kind stipulated by its Hungarian counterpart. Drawing on the Kremsier Constitution draft of 1849, the Austrian nationality stipulations laid down equality of rights for all *Volksstämme* or peoples, their right to preserve and cultivate their nationality and language, as well as the equality of all languages (*landesübliche Sprachen*) in school, administration and public life.[20] Similar to the Hungarian nationality legislation, the Austrian constitution did not recognize the nationalities as political entities either, nor were its liberal stipulations fully translated into practice.[21]

Although the Hungarian nationalities law antagonized many of the non-Hungarian political leaders, a quick browse through the actual text of the law will show it to be a most liberal document, containing

numerous provisions for the cultural and linguistic independence of the nationalities in Hungary. But as with many emancipating laws, the proof is in their actual application, and these liberal provisions of the 1868 nationalities law unfortunately remained for the most part a dead letter. For all its inconvenient formulations the law in itself would not have posed such major problems in a parliamentary system that provided proportional representation, even within the narrow margin of a six per cent franchise. The real problem arose when rampant corruption prevented genuine parliamentary representation.

Franchise in Hungary

Notoriously admonished in the Hungarian governmental daily *Pester Lloyd* as an instance of Babel-like confusion (*babylonische Verworrenheit zum Gesetz erhoben*), the Electoral Law of 1874 was a refurbishment of the 1848 law and a highly interpretable and intricate act of Parliament.[22] As such, it granted franchise to a small percentage of the total population of Hungary on a complex basis of property, taxation, and ancient rights,[23] and, far from drawing clear boundaries between voters and non-voters, lent itself to discretionary interpretation and enforcement so that 'its stipulations made it possible for even a moderately astute copyist to either contest or demonstrate the right to vote of any given person in Hungary'.[24]

In addition to the legislated confusion regarding the criteria for designating franchise holders, a number of other factors contributed to an erratic and, as such, easily manipulated voting process. One of them was the demarcation of electoral districts, which, given the lack of any legal stipulation, fell to the lot of administrative authorities and gave rise to chronic gerrymandering. Thus, the number of voters varied between 158 (Abrudbánya) and 6,009 (Homonna) for one electoral district, notwithstanding the fact that each of them could only send one representative to Parliament. The boundaries of electoral districts were tailored so that in each of them pro-governmental voters constituted a majority. Eugen Brote shows how 12 non-Romanian districts, together amounting to 5,161 voters, still fell short of the voter number of the Karánsebes district in the Banat, with a majority of Romanian

population (5,275 voters), so that the former could elect 12 representatives while the latter, only one.[25]

Administrative bureaucracy had become, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a powerful instrument for 'making the elections and perpetuating the Liberal majority' with the result that 'some 160 constituencies, inhabited mainly by Slovaks and Romanians, turned into "rotten boroughs" under bureaucratic tutelage' returning with 'monotonous regularity candidates of the incumbent party'.[26] Within this context, a frequently-used manipulative strategy was the location of the polling station at the periphery of an electoral district or as far away from the non-Hungarian voters or non-governmental sympathizers as possible in an attempt to foster absenteeism.[27]

R.W. Seton-Watson, the self-styled Travelling Scotsman or Scotus Viator, and perhaps one of the most knowledgeable westerners in Austro-Hungarian matters at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, made a point of collecting evidence of electoral obstructionism practiced in Hungary. For the Banat he stopped at the Karánsebes constituency, part of the former Military Border and inhabited mostly by Romanians. On the basis of official documents issued by the Karánsebes *Főszólgabiró* (chief district administrative officer), Seton-Watson reconstituted the rigmarole of local politics whereby the civil administration played hide-and-seek with the candidate of the Romanian National Party in the name of maintaining public order during elections. The representative of the Romanian National Party, Dr Aurelius Vlad, was allowed to hold only one public meeting of the three he had initially requested permission for; the explanation given was that on the other two dates the candidate of the rival party had announced his intention to hold public meetings. The local authorities feared that encounters between the supporters of the two candidates could result in clashes and disturbances. Moreover, the Romanian candidate was denied other public meetings in Ohababisztra and Őrményes (Armeniş), where 'seventeen cases of the infectious disease of sore throat and whooping cough' had arisen. As the remaining public meetings that Dr Vlad was permitted to hold were to take place strictly at the agreed time ('they may not begin either earlier or later') and in the

presence of representatives of the Hungarian administration, a ban was placed on the Romanian candidate using his motor-car for canvassing purposes: 'According to information received, the organizers of the meeting have the intention of going from one place to the other by motor-car. Since, however, it is absolutely necessary for representatives of the political service to be present at such meetings, and since they drive from one meeting to the other in carriages, it might happen that the organizers of the meeting spin out so long that there is only just enough time to reach the next meeting punctually by using a motor-car. In that event the representative of the Government who has to use the far slower conveyance of a carriage, would be obliged either to leave one meeting far sooner or to arrive late at the next. But popular meetings cannot possibly be allowed to take place for however short a time without the presence of the Government authorities' (Karánsebes, 23 May 1910). Further injunctions, such as the 'refusal to allow Romanian canvassers to enter villages', prohibitions of religious meetings during elections or of 'carriages driven by men who are not natives of the particular village' or 'strangers acting as canvassers', completed the tableau of selective electoral interdictions in south-eastern Banat.[28]

Magyarization or Betraying the Fatherland

Such obstructionism and a tailored system of political representation – not unlike that of liberal Spain at the same time, where whole cemeteries ended up voting in sham elections – were necessary in Hungary in order to maintain 'a parliamentary oligarchy of noble landowners' in power.[29] In the spirit of the medieval, caste-like concept of nation, these clung to their historical privileges and did not conceive of devolving power to the nationalities. By 1910, Hungarian parties, which represented ten million inhabitants, had 405 MPs in Parliament, while the nationalities' parties, which represented 11 million people, were able to send merely eight.[30]

There was one nation only in Hungary from the point of view of Hungarian land owners and the sooner the wayward nationalities assimilated to it, the better for everyone. This was to be achieved

through imposition of the Hungarian language as the only official language and as the exclusive language of education. Nationalities' schools were shut down, permission to set up new ones was denied, cultural funds were confiscated and public protests were prosecuted under the Hungarian press law, which criminalized incitement to hatred against the Hungarian nation. If anything, these measures antagonized and soured the willing Magyarization that was taking place among the middle classes of Hungary as a means of social advancement.

In the Banat, willing assimilation made inroads among the *Schwaben*, who as a mostly peasant community did not have political representation commensurate with that of the Serbs and Romanians. What provided the impetus for the political organization of the *Schwaben* was a growing awareness of the rapid rate of assimilation as well as the concomitant forceful Magyarization, which eliminated German from schools and administration. Shut off from Vienna, the German population of the Banat looked to the Saxons in Transylvania, who were much better organized socially and politically. Taking their cue from the Saxons, the *Schwaben* of the Banat set up farmers' associations (*Bauernvereine*), which had a function of cultural preservation. Alternatively, they sought help outside the frontiers of Hungary in the German Empire. The Hungarian government's clamp-down on the affiliation of Banat *Schwaben* to the German school association in Berlin (*Schulverein*) led to massive protests that made headlines in the international press for weeks to come.

Not surprisingly, most of the initiatives of the Banat *Schwaben* came from among the urban population and in particular from the former Banat Military Border. These frontier towns had traditionally enjoyed the use of German in education and public affairs as up until 1872 they had been under direct imperial rule and German-language administration. Thus, one of the cultural power bases of the Banat *Schwaben* (and of the *Schwaben* in the rest of Hungary) was to be found in Weißkirchen. The small town that had put up such fierce resistance against the Serbs during the 1848 revolution had now become one of the most active centres for the preservation of Danube Swabian language and culture against Magyarization.

The *Schwaben* were latecomers to the Hungarian political scene with the first Popular Party of the Hungarian Germans (*Ungarländischen Deutschen Volkpartei*) finally inaugurated in 1906 under the leadership of Edmund Steinacker.[31]

Once religious differences were put aside, the Serbs and Romanians in the Banat revived their former Illyrian solidarity at the level of political programmes and goals. Their two national parties came into being at roughly the same time in 1869, under the leadership of the Mocsonys on the Romanian side, and Svetozar Miletić on the Serbian. The former co-religionists were now joining forces for a parliamentary struggle that would, so they hoped, solve the nationality issue.[32] Although Miletić was concomitantly encouraging Great Serbian projects in the Balkans and the Romanian leaders had strong ties with intellectuals in the Romanian Kingdom, they nevertheless kept within the boundaries of legality and looked to Budapest for a solution to their grievances.

Sporadic attempts were made to bypass the unrelenting Hungarian authorities and reach out for help or lodge complaints with the Habsburg Emperor but these invariably ended badly and were for the most part initiated outside the Banat. Thus, Germans who turned to the Emperor for help with the maintenance of the German Theatre in Pest were dismissed from their jobs.[33] In Transylvania the Romanian national intelligentsia sent a *Memorandum*, or petition, to the Emperor in 1892 asking for intercession against Hungarian political and cultural oppression. The Emperor sent the petition back to the Budapest authorities, who proceeded to prosecute the signatories under the charge of treason. The Banat Romanians, unlike their more assertive co-nationals in Transylvania, persisted in advocating that a solution be found within Hungary and by parliamentary means. Just as in the case of the *Schwaben*, the Romanians in the Banat drew their strongest support from the former Military Border territories. Thus one of their most notable attempts to attract imperial attention was made in the late 1880s, when they were closely working with the retired imperial general Trajan Doda, a native of the Banat Military Border and since 1874 a Romanian MP in the Hungarian Parliament, and tried to use his connections to the Emperor's Military Chancellery.[34]

In the 1887 elections for the Hungarian Parliament, General Doda secured a parliamentary seat as the national representative of the Karánsebes electoral district and, as it turned out, the only Romanian national representative in the Hungarian Parliament. In protest against this glaring political under-representation, he refused to hand in his credentials and to participate in the parliamentary proceedings, at the same time refusing to give up his parliamentary seat.[35] He justified his attitude in a public letter to the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Péchy Tamás, as a form of protest against the fraudulent way in which the government had handled the elections. The validation of only one national representative of the Romanians in Hungary in the 1887 elections constituted the nadir of political under-representation of Romanians in Hungarian politics since the establishment of the modern constitutional system in 1848. As Doda stressed in a second letter he sent to his Karánsebes voters,

> …today we are no longer talking about a seat or a vote in the
> Hungarian Parliament or about some minor national linguistic
> or political concessions – for these are mere trifles today given
> the critical situation we are in; today the cause of the entire
> Romanian nation and, indeed, the honour itself of the Romanian
> people are at stake, a people who have been ousted from the
> constitutional fight through machinations and violence and who
> found one last refuge in your electoral district.[36]

Correspondence between prominent Romanian activists of the time reveals not only that other Romanian intellectuals from the Banat and from Transylvania were involved in this political move but also that this had been a well-planned project, which was meant to solve the problem of political under-representation in a more effective way than the hitherto applied policy of passivity and petitionarism. The aim was to use General Doda's military status in order to bring to the Emperor's attention the political predicament of the nationalities in Hungary.[37] This protest, just like the previous ones, ended in failure. Its outcome was the eventual cancellation of Doda's mandate and the organization of new elections for the Karánsebes district. The letter

Doda addressed to his voters came to constitute the grounds for his impeachment under the charge of incitement against the Hungarian race.[38] This followed from a new addition to the Penal Code of 1878 (§ 172 *Strafgesetz* 1878), which criminalized incitement through the press against class, nationality, and religion, and rendered it punishable by up to two years' imprisonment.[39] An attack of apoplexy[40] prevented Doda from showing up in court and the sentence was finally passed *in absentia*. The sentence (two years' imprisonment and a fine of 1,000 Florins) was annulled following medical investigation of Doda's condition and the trial was eventually discontinued by the Hungarian authorities.

The Writing on the Wall

The Hungarian fear of irredentism was more of a self-fulfilling prophecy than an actual threat. The liberally meted-out accusation of *Vaterlandsverrat* (Betrayal of the Fatherland) and the labelling of nationally-minded citizens as Panslavs or Daco-Romans or Pan-Germans combined with restrictions on political representation ended up (to paraphrase the words of the leading Hungarian politician, Count István Tisza) making enemies out of loyal citizens.[41] The Hungarian political class was by no means unanimous in their nationality phobia and many Cassandra-like voices warned of the dire consequences of this political shortsightedness. One of the promoters of the nationality cause among Hungarian politicians was Lajos Mocsary, a small Hungarian landowner who followed in the footsteps of Ferenc Deák and József Eötvös, the founding fathers of Hungarian liberalism, and fought for a peaceful solution to national claims, even offering to stand for the Romanian National Party in the Banat after General Doda's mandate was invalidated by the Hungarian Parliament. In 1906, in the context of renewed hopes for the nationalities at the prospect of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's accession to the throne, the Transylvanian MP Thoroczkay talked of the need to reach an understanding with the nationalities, or else risk the country's independence.[42] A settlement with the nationalities of Hungary had been long overdue by 1914 and when the moment of crisis occurred there were no bonds formed,

either civic or cultural, that would hold the country together. Miklós Bánffy, Transylvanian MP and Foreign Minister for Hungary after the Great War, was to deplore in later years the Hungarian political class who failed to see the writing on the wall, that is, they were unable and unwiling to reach a consensus with the nationalities. At the end of the war, without a common point of allegiance to keep them together (the old Emperor Franz Joseph died in 1916 after ruling for more than half a century), the various regions of Hungary split along ethnic lines and found other political centres of gravitation. Partaking in the general fate of Hungary, the Banat was partitioned, each shard of it going the way of the national state: Romania, Serbia and rump Hungary.

CHAPTER 9

PARTING OF WAYS

The Test of Loyalties

The outbreak of World War I put an end to parliamentary proceedings in the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy, but not in Hungary. István Tisza, the Prime Minister of Hungary, used the extensive constitutional autonomy of the Hungarian lands to ensure that both the Budapest Parliament and the Croatian *Sabor* continued their activity throughout the war. Since the Sarajevo assassination, national politics in Hungary had taken a turn for the worse. The death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand robbed national leaders in Hungary of their hope of prevailing over Hungarian political hegemony with Austrian help. Unlike the old Emperor, the heir to the Habsburg throne was minded to reform the monarchy and lent a sympathetic ear to the leaders of non-Hungarian nationalities. With his assassination all hopes of a solution to national grievances turned to dust. This was not immediately apparent as the war pulled all strands of Austro-Hungarian society together and created, at least in the early days of the conflict, the semblance of consensus. Mobilization ran smoothly and in the early stages of the war there were no resounding cases of treason or defection like the infamous 1913 Redl case. Things would change dramatically in the last stages of what turned out to be a four-year war, when war weariness and hunger set in, fraying tempers and allegiances.

From the Banat as from all other corners of the Monarchy trains full of young men bound to the front pulled out of stations, taking

many to their deaths irrespective of rank, social status or allegiance. As recent scholarship has stressed, while much has been made of the loyalty of those who went to the front as well as of the cases of disloyalty, little attention has been paid to the much more common attitude of national indifference. Miloš Crnjanski, a Serbian writer from the Banat, fought on the Galician front in the Austro-Hungarian army and talked about mobilization in the Banat in his semi-autobiographical *Journal de Čarnojević* published in 1927. Here the diarist captures the mixture of starry-eyed enthusiasm and down-to-earth irony that characterized his comrades' attitudes to the war. Conviction and idealism went to war side by side with disenchantment and ironic indifference:

> We travel to our death in two ways. Some are spick and span; their buttons shine. They are nice and smile affably. They embrace their families for a long time at the railway station. They kiss their wife's hand, cry with their mother, hug their brother and lift up their son in their arms. They read the newspapers and feverishly discuss about the freedom of peoples. They carry with them the letters and lockets of their loves ones. They are interested in everything, and their mother and wife talk for a long time, cry without trying to hide it, tidy things up, fuss and take long good-byes. But side by side with them, there is a young woman who is not crying; she has an ironic smile on her face. She is pale; she does not wait for the train to pick up speed and says good-bye before that by giving him a kiss and gentle smile. 'Take care you don't catch a cold and get a toothache like you always do!' She too would like to embrace him and cry, but he would not let her. He won't let his mother see him off. He hates emotional goodbyes. He sends her from the railway station to the theatre and speaks to her about her hat, which she throws away in tears when she comes back home. He doesn't bother his head with questions about the justness or meaning of the war; but lightly gets on to the train and quickly finds his seat; his main concern is to have enough money for cigarettes. He is a young doctor. 'Smoking', he told me when he took his seat by my side, 'is, according to a Turkish proverb, sitting on the clouds

and smiling down at the earth.' Later on, amidst clouds of smoke,
I heard in the carriage two voices. One fervently defended the
honour of his people, believed in the army and talked about his
son; the other jeered and told about the thieving of the General
Staff, about the mud and the rain.[1]

Apart from mobilization proper, for most inhabitants of the Banat of
Temesvár the coming of the war meant a redoubled police supervi-
sion of the region, which was now bordering on the Serbian front line,
and also the distinct possibility, if recruited into the army, of fighting
against their co-nationals across the border. Of the several nationalities
residing in the Banat, the Serbs were the first to be confronted with
this ethical dilemma. The old tradition of loyalty to the Emperor that
still lingered in the former Banat Military Border as well as fear of
reprisals similar to the ones that took place in Bosnia ensured that the
Serbian population of the Banat remained faithful to the Habsburg
Crown. After Romania's entry in the war on the side of the Entente in
1916, the Romanian population in the Banat faced a similar dilemma.
To avoid conscience crises and ethical choices among their troops, the
Habsburg army command made a point wherever possible of never
sending a regiment to fight in a region of the same ethnicity. As a con-
sequence, Serbian and Romanian troops fought mostly on the Italian
and Russian fronts and they fought well. The civilian population
left at home was carefully supervised through a network of wartime
secret police, whose overzealous activity resulted in endless arrests and
prosecutions.

The war offered an X-ray of Austro-Hungarian society and con-
firmed the previously quoted judgment put forth by Lothar Höbelt
that it was exaggerated fears and knee-jerk reactions which eventually
brought the Monarchy down rather than the disloyalty of its nationally
disaffected peoples. A great number of Austrian and Hungarian citi-
zens, many but not all of Serbian nationality, were arrested, interned,
deported or executed on the accusation of helping the enemy. István
Tisza, the Hungarian Prime Minister, complained to the War Ministry
in Vienna in September 1914 that arbitrary arrests were taking place
which could make enemies out of perfectly loyal citizens and warned

about the negative consequences that the system of espionage and secret police was having on the population.[2] Contrary to expectations, the troops on the Serbian front gave the lie to fears of national fraternization. This was the case of Bosnian Serbian soldiers, who had been separated from their regiment and sent inland, far away from the front line, as potentially unreliable elements. Surprisingly enough for the Austro-Hungarian command, the Bosnian Serbs asked to be allowed to return and fight alongside their regiment against the Serbs. The commanders gave their consent and did not regret their decision, their Serbian soldiers proving as brave on the battlefield as those of any other nationality.[3]

In the Banat one of the many arrests made in the summer of 1914 by the Border Police and Gendarmerie was that of a retired imperial general of Romanian nationality. General Nikolaus Cena came under suspicion on account of his archaeological hobby, having made photographs and maps of the region and dug up Roman remains and fortresses in southern Banat. He also maintained contact with officers from the Romanian Kingdom, which, at that point in time, was still a friendly neighbour. When interrogated by the Hungarian authorities in the summer of 1914, Cena admitted that in conversation with the Romanian officers the subject of taking sides in a possible war did come up, but he insisted that he had made it clear to his interlocutors that, in case of a war against Romania, he would remain on the imperial side.[4] This was a man who until the outbreak of the war had strived to preserve Romanian culture and religion in the Banat and, as an active general, used to march his troops to Romanian national songs.[5] In wartime, however, he remained a loyal soldier of the Habsburg Emperor and took offence at any suggestion to the contrary. As shown by similar testimonies, the army acted as a binding medium for the nationally diverse citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Austrian journalist Friedrich Funder observed the same attitude among the German officers of the Austro-Hungarian army: even if in times of peace they were supporters of German imperialism, took part in celebrations of the Hohenzollern dynasty and venerated Bismarck, once on the battlefield they became loyal Austrians.[6] Even the much maligned Czech soldiers fought well provided they had a good commanding officer.

In his *Journal de Čarnojević* Miloš Crnjanski's alter ego experiences the everyday ambiguity of serving in a multi-ethnic army, fighting in a war that exceeded all previous ones in terms of the sheer scale of human destruction, and oscillating between personal conviction, military duty and the meaninglessness of human sacrifice:

> I talk about Napoleon and Debussy to a German, then to a Czech about the Empress, about whom strange rumours are circulating, then a Slovene starts chatting to me. He secretly tells me stories first about Grohar [a Slovene painter], then about the troop commander Mišić [marshal in the Serbian army which repelled the Austrians in the battle of Cer in 1914]. In the meantime, thousands of men march out. The dead count has reached 100,000. And we are all content. At dinner we recall our childhood, the village bands, the schools. Everybody talks about the war and praises his people as much as the general's eye allows it. We argue in a low voice on the subject of the Germans, who are a bunch of bandits, and of the French, about whom the general says they are all pederasts. And the day passes like this. Tomorrow starts the offensive. But today we are waiting for the general to ring his little bell and give us the signal that we can light our tobacco. We are staring in the void each of us wrapped up in his smoke and once again another day will have passed. But a better century will come, it always does. [. . .] I do not wish for anything; I have no regrets; I am fine. I will cross frontiers, towns and villages, forests and rivers and the only thing left of them all will be the dust on my feet, the silence in my heart and on my face a gentle smile, feverish and meaningless.[7]

Peace for the Small and for the Big

In East-Central Europe the end of the First World War brought about the dissolution of imperial rule, radical territorial upheavals and unprecedented frontiers. By 1918 all three Empires that dominated the region, Tsarist, German and Habsburg, were in ruins and

in their place several smaller states, mostly nation states, but also two federations (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) sprang into being. The simplifying myth about the peace conferences that concluded the war is that the New Europe was the brainchild of the Big Four. The big territorial issues and the measures against the defeated countries were indeed dealt with by the four leaders, American President Wilson, British Prime Minister Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Clemenceau and Italian Prime Minister Orlando. The myriad little details and intricacies of delimiting minor borders fell, however, within the remit of a host of commissions bringing together historians, diplomats and politicians from the countries involved. Further frontier issues were solved outside the framework of the conference altogether, as part of diplomatic negotiations between neighbouring countries.

A frequently overlooked element in the peace negotiations was the extent of military occupation and the distribution of troops in enemy territory. Thus, in 1918 Serbian troops had occupied part of the Banat, including Temesvár, while Romanian troops had reached inland as far as Budapest. Making territorial claims in these conditions was not so much a matter of negotiation, as one of imposing terms. Between equally victorious countries, territorial divisions were bound to be more complicated as the partition of the Banat between Serbia and Romania would show.

Strutting and Fretting Their Hour

In the limbo period between the end of the war and the final verdict of the peace conference, the Banat went through several types of makeshift administration and spawned several national councils that aimed to restore order in the land, each on their own terms. This interlude, which lasted almost a year, recapitulated all the wishful thinking and political formulae available at the time regarding the organization and territorial affiliation of the province. The die was yet to be cast and, as the situation was infinitely malleable due to the void of power created by the break-up of the Monarchy, all nationalities in the Banat sought to mould it according to their political vision.

On 1 November 1918 Otto Roth, a member of the Hungarian Social Democrat Party, together with Albert Bartha, the Military Commander of Temesvár, proclaimed an autonomous Banat Republic under Hungarian rule. The *Schwaben* and Romanians convened their own national councils. The *Schwaben* were split into three factions: some supported the Banat Republic and saw their future as part of a federative Hungary; others were for a union with the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and a third faction pressed for an incorporation of the Banat into Romania.[8] The Romanians, for their part, rejected Hungarian proposals and were by now looking to Transylvania and the Romanian Kingdom. The Banat Republic endured no more than a couple of weeks and was brought to an end by the arrival of Serbian and French troops. The Serbs had their day under Serbian administration of the province until the arrival of French General Berthelot, who handed over command of the eastern, Romanian-inhabited Banat to Romanian troops.

Bidding for the Banat

'A chameleon placed on a coloured population-map of the Banat would explode.'[9] This was a remark that Leigh-Fermor heard about the Banat during his travels across Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s. It was this ethnic variety that made the province so difficult to divide after the First World War. But why divide it in the first place? The governing principle behind the partition of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had been that of Wilsonian national self-determination: each nation should have its own state. This was easier said than done in a region where there had never before existed nation states in the modern sense of the word and population distribution had followed principles other than the recently postulated national one: wars, conquests, colonization, political and economic migration had brought in a multitude of ethnic groups and confessions and had driven others out, so that any partition would inevitably leave minorities on either side of the border in the receiving states.

Since the Hungarians, as a defeated people, were hardly in a position to stake claims on any of their former provinces, this left Serbia

and Romania to clash in their conflicting territorial demands over the Banat. In addition to its considerable German population, the Banat was inhabited by Hungarians in the north, Serbs in the west and Romanians in the east, which left in the central region an inextricable ethnic mix. Thus the national principle could not provide a clear-cut solution for the division of the multi-ethnic borderland and, consequently, other types of arguments were invoked.

At the peace conference the Romanian diplomats asked for the entire Banat on the basis of a secret treaty which Romania had signed in August 1916 with the Entente powers and which was similar to the 1915 one which brought Italy into the war on the side of the Entente. By the terms of this treaty Romania agreed to enter the war on the side of the Entente on condition that it would be awarded Transylvania, Bukovina and the whole of the Banat at the end of the war. Romanian Prime Minister Brătianu was particularly intransigent about his delegation's claims over the Banat. He demanded the entire province in complete breach of the nationality principle. As the Romanians had concluded a separate peace with the Central Powers in 1918, after which they resumed the war on the side of the Entente, the Yugoslav representatives considered the 1916 treaty to be null and void and asked for a partition of the Banat.[10] The province, the Romanians pleaded further, constituted an economic and geographic whole, which could only be divided at the expense of its functional unity. The Romanians were riding high at this time: their country was well on its way to almost doubling in size as a consequence of the peace treaties, with Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina attaching to the old Romanian Kingdom. They were also in a position to stake claims as their armies were at the time in control of a good part of Hungary. As regards Romanian demands predicated on economic reasons, these were not unique in the context of the post-war territorial divisions. The integration of the German-inhabited Sudetenland into the newly emerged Czechoslovak state, although in blatant contradiction with the nationality principle, followed a similar rationale, the high industrial potential of the region being deemed vital for the economic survival of the new state.

Yugoslav claims were more moderate by comparison. They asked only for the western half of the Banat, that is, the plains, which

were inhabited by Serbs for the most part, but also by Germans and Hungarians. They thought, moreover, that the German population there would join them for economic reasons. The Hungarians, in their turn, stressed the indivisibility of the Banat for their own benefit and not without justice. Apart from the historic claims they advanced, they also pointed out that the Banat was, from an economic point of view, closely linked with the rest of Hungary.[11] Although promoting their own cause, the Hungarians were a prophetic voice in the wilderness, stressing, as economic historians would do in later years, the consequences that the break-up of empires would have on the economic structure of the region. It would take a long time for the resulting 'Frankenstein' states to reach a level of economic cohesion and functionality comparable with that of the former empires. This hard-won cohesion was dealt a death blow by the Great Depression and the upheavals of the Second World War.

Despite the territorial squabbling surrounding it, once agreed on, the partition of the Banat was one of the more peaceful and less painful divisions carried out during the peace conferences. While some of the Serbian population was inevitably left stranded in the Romanian portion of the Banat and, similarly, Romanians were included into the Yugoslav Kingdom, the division was largely successful in terms of majorities: two-thirds of the province, including Temesvár (from now on to be called by its Romanian name, Timişoara), and most of the Romanian population became part of the enlarged Romanian Kingdom; one-third of the Banat, comprising most of the Serbs, was attached to the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later to be called Yugoslavia; and a minute wedge in the north of the province was returned to Hungary, which following the Treaty of Trianon had dwindled to a mere shadow of its former territorial self.

CHAPTER 10

THE BANAT IN YUGOSLAVIA

Squaring the Circle of Imperial Legacies

In 1919 the Paris Peace Conference attached the south-western part of the Banat to a precariously articulated state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The South Slavs, or Yugoslavs as they would henceforth be known, were thrown together by rapid political developments following World War I and stumbled into a necessary but ill-thought-out union that antagonized more people than it appeased. Utopian plans for a union of all South Slavs dated back to the nineteenth century, when Serbian and Croatian intellectuals dreamt up political formulas for such a union. With nowhere else to go and unable to form national states of their own, the Croats and Slovenes had to fall back on the old formula of an all-South-Slav union. This political solution, however, had never been tried out before and, as with all such utopian visions, involved more wishful thinking than actual pragmatic statesmanship. Details and practicalities of how such a South Slav state could ever effectively function had never been worked out before. With the post-war union of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into a single state, utopia was by necessity translated into reality and fell far short of expectations. The peoples thus united were bringing into the new country divergent political visions stemming from different historical experiences: while the Croats and Slovenes envisaged the new state as a loose federation that would grant administrative autonomy to individual regions, the

Serbs conceived of the union as an opportunity to centralize and create a Greater Serbia.

The south-western Banat, or Serbian Banat, as it would be known in regional historical bibliography, became part of this tug-of-war between centralizing and federalizing forces, being integrated into the province of Vojvodina, now inclusive of the former south Hungarian regions Bačka, Baranja and the splintered Banat. Seventy years after the throes of the 1848–49 revolution, a new Vojvodina was coming into being, this time outside the boundaries of the Habsburg Empire, which had been its creative matrix. The new province harked back to the territorial chimera dreamt up by Serbian revolutionaries in 1848/49 on the basis of the old Illyrian privileges as well as to the short-lived Habsburg post-revolutionary construct, the Serbian Voivodship and Banat of Temesvár. By acquiring Vojvodina, Serbia possessed itself of what had been its main cultural and intellectual centre throughout the nineteenth century (many of the dignitaries of the young Serbian state had been schooled in the Habsburg Illyrian schools) and that which, in comparison with its other provinces, would be its richest and most progressive of territories.

Just like the Romanians and the Czechoslovaks, the Yugoslavs were the greatest beneficiaries of the 1919–1920 Peace Treaties in terms of territorial gains. However, with new territories and population came also the challenge of integrating them into a new, unprecedented system of administration. This was no mean feat. Apart from incompatibilities of political vision, the Yugoslav state had to cope with a mind-boggling administrative legacy of eight legal systems, 'six different customs areas, five currencies, four railway networks, and three types of banking systems'[1] plus several patterns of land tenure and the peasant grievances that went hand-in-hand with them. All this took place against a backdrop of post-war poverty and devastation, which the severing of old economic ties between the component regions and former imperial markets did nothing to help.

Minority Rights on Paper

As the division of Central and Eastern Europe along national lines left sizeable minorities in old and new countries alike, a solution for

peaceful cohabitation was necessary to ensure that the new states were stable and strong enough to withstand the spread of Bolshevism and form a safe girdle around a possibly revanchist Germany. Minority treaties were consequently introduced which required the new states to pledge themselves to grant all citizens equal rights and freedom to practice their religion and speak their own language. There were several reasons why these minority stipulations were not worth the paper they were written on. First of all, the discriminatory basis on which minority treaties were signed worked as a disincentive to applying them. It was only the new states which came into being on the ruins of the old empires that had to sign such conventions; none of the other European countries had to pledge themselves to the protection of their own minorities. For instance, while Yugoslavia and Romania had to make sure that their respective German communities enjoyed the full boon of civil and cultural rights, Italy was, by contrast, under no such injunction, an exemption that Mussolini himself was to brag about in later years.

Secondly, minority treaties were resented from the very beginning and met with fierce resistance from the prospective signatories, who looked upon them as a breach of their recently-acquired state sovereignty. The precedent that rankled in their memory was that of the Berlin Peace Treaty of 1878, which introduced minority protection clauses for the Ottoman Empire. This was perceived as an invitation to the Great Powers to meddle in the Ottomans' internal affairs and thus hasten the disintegration of their empire. Yugoslav statesmen, moreover, insisted that minority stipulations should be applied only to the newly acquired lands, and not to Serbian territory as it stood after the two Balkan wars. Their fear was that, by applying minority regulations in particular to southern Serbia (including Kosovo and northern Albania), this would be tantamount to recognizing the non-Serbian minorities there, which ran against the grain of the Serbian national myth. Given their common Ottoman past, both Serbia and Romania were great centralizers, having learnt from their own experience within the Ottoman Empire that the separate status of a region led to autonomy, which in turn led to complete independence. This had been the pattern they themselves had

used to break away from the Ottomans and after World War I they came to fear that their own minorities might play the same hand against them.[2]

Thirdly, responsibility for the observation of minority guarantees lay with a special council within the newly formed League of Nations. The hopelessly understaffed commission was the only institutional body that could initiate an inquiry into minority-related irregularities and, of the numerous complaints that were filed from the new states, very few were actually taken on board and looked into. The minority clauses were as strong as their strongest defender, which is to say they were not very strong at all.[3]

One stipulation of the minority treaties that was made use of on a great scale was the possibility it offered to the inhabitants of the redistributed territories to opt, within the time span of two years, for one citizenship or another depending on their ethnic background and political allegiance. This was the go-ahead for massive population movements across the freshly drawn borders, some motivated by political conviction, the great majority of them being, as we shall see further on in this chapter, motivated by economic reasons.[4]

Agrarian Reform – Winners and Losers

In Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia nothing rocked the political boat more than the land reform of the early 1920s. Having been introduced very quickly to prevent social unrest in the wake of the war, the land reform was a tool in the hands of centralist Serbian politicians aiming at colonizing and 'Serbianizing' their territories. The new policy targeted primarily Kosovo and southern Serbia, but was also pursued across Yugoslavia as a whole. The Serbian Banat followed this general pattern and saw the break-up of great estates and the distribution of available land to Serbian war volunteers (going back in time to include those who had fought against Ottoman rule in the Bosnia-Herzegovina uprising of the 1870s, the two Balkan wars and the Great War). This put the minorities of the Banat at a distinct disadvantage and created the general feeling among them that they were excluded from the benefits of the land reform.[5]

Particularly affected by the politicized land reform in the Serbian Banat were landless peasants and those in possession of very little land, who had up until then made a living working on the great estates. Once these were broken up and the bulk of them allotted to Serbian war veterans, hundreds of local peasant families, especially from among the minorities of the Banat, were left landless outside the loop of agrarian reform. Communal land was in some cases given over to colonists settled in various Banat villages by the Belgrade authorities. Appeals for redress were initially directed to Belgrade, where they fell on deaf ears or elicited empty promises. Where land was distributed to the minorities it was considerably less than what a colonized Serbian war volunteer would receive (1.5 hectares as opposed to 5 hectares).[6]

Given the nature of landownership in pre-war Hungary, the Banat minority most directly affected by the land reform were the Hungarians. As great estate owners, they had their land expropriated and lost their labour force through migration or internal resettlement. Many Hungarian landowners as well as members of the middle classes who had been part of the former imperial administrative apparatus, opted for Hungarian citizenship and moved to Budapest or elsewhere in rump Hungary. There they came to reinforce the revisionist movement that struggled for a reversal of the Trianon Treaty.[7]

Encroachments upon land in northern Banat led to tensions between the Swabian inhabitants and the newly settled colonists. Land that the enterprising *Schwaben* had bought before or after the war was, in some cases, illegally redistributed to the newcomers. But the *Schwaben*, who were by tradition among the most prosperous of the small-landowning peasant stratum, were less disadvantaged by the expropriation of Hungarian estates than other minority groups of the Banat. Expropriations removed an element of agrarian competition for the *Schwaben* and also created the opportunity for them to buy or lease more land whenever the colonists were not able to adjust to the new circumstances or were not able to cultivate their land. Exaggerated as it no doubt was, the perception that the *Schwaben* were buying all the expropriated land on sale was so widespread that by 1929, when a wave of belated applications for Hungarian citizenship took place following the onset of the royal dictatorship in Yugoslavia, the

Hungarian authorities sought to discourage the applicants for fear that 'the rich *Schwaben* would end up ousting the remaining Hungarian population'.[8]

Romanian peasant families turned to the Romanian state and asked for citizenship and land either in the Romanian Banat or elsewhere in Romania. The 'Mother Country', however, turned out to be less than welcoming. In some cases Romanian peasants from the Yugoslav Banat received some land, although less than stipulated by the Romanian Land Reform Law. With no additional state support to help them get started, they more often than not got bogged down in debts and unpaid taxes. Others struggled for years to obtain even this modicum of land. In 1922 a delegation of immigrants from the Serbian Banat were rudely turned away by the Romanian Minister of Agriculture: 'You've come to Romania to get rich [...] there's no land here for you.' By the 1930s debates were still taking place in the Romanian parliament regarding the plight of Romanian immigrants and the threat their dire impoverishment posed to the social equilibrium of the country.[9]

The Banat in the Yugoslav Political Carousel

Two years after the end of the war, the first post-war parliamentary elections were called, which drew all the classes and ethnic groups of Yugoslavia into a vortex of political activity. The extension of the franchise to include all male population over 21 turned politics from an erstwhile sport of the elites[10] into a popular arena where each vote, however humble or misinformed, counted and was to be coaxed into toeing this or that party line. After two years of exclusively Serbian government and after a politically-motivated land reform that frayed tempers and created discontent among the minorities, the time had finally come for these antagonisms to be played out in parliament. What the electoral law and the passing of the first constitution (the Vidovdan Constitution) brought into being was a highly volatile political system dominated by mutual suspicion and mutually intransigent stances. The Radical Party headed by Nikola Pašić together with the more progressive Democratic Party (under the leadership of Ljuba

Davidović) represented the main political forces of Old Serbia and pursued a policy of centralization. Their opposition were the Croat Peasant Party, led by Stjepan Radić, and the Slovene People's Party, which fought, each in their own way, to secure a federal structure for the new state and regional administrative autonomy.[11]

The new Habsburg territorial additions brought into the Yugoslav Kingdom not only 'foreigners' but also a sizeable number of Serbs (a fifth of the total Serbian population). In a formulation which was similar to that distinguishing the Romanian inhabitants of Bessarabia from those of the Romanian province of Moldavia (Romanians from across the Prut River), the Serbs of Yugoslavia were divided after the War into two groups: the *prečani* Serbs, the Serbs from 'beyond' the Una, Sava and Danube Rivers, and the *srbijanci* Serbs, those of the pre-war Serbian Kingdom.[12] It was paradoxically the leader of the *prečani* Serbs, Svetozar Pribičević, who was the most outspoken advocate of rigid centralism and a fierce adversary of any federal solution.[13]

As to the *Schwaben*, their political movement in Yugoslavia drew its support from two sources. One was a strong Cultural Association (*Kulturbund*), which connected the *Schwaben* in Vojvodina with their co-nationals in Germany. As strange as it may seem, the Yugoslav *Schwaben* did not look to Austria, of whose former empire they had been a part for almost two centuries, but rather to Germany. Given the dual structure of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which meant that Austrian authorities including the Emperor would not meddle in Hungarian internal affairs, the Germans in Hungary grew estranged from Vienna and, when in need of help, turned to Berlin instead. The previously mentioned *Schulverein*, or School Union, of the late nineteenth century was one of the first cultural ties that developed between the *Schwaben* in Hungary and the German *Reich*. This connection was to extend into the interwar period and would receive a new lease of life with the establishment of the *Kulturbund*. The second source of the political movement of *Schwaben* in Yugoslavia was the tradition of minority politics in pre-war Hungary. Many of the former leaders of the German party in Hungary went on to become the new leaders of its equivalent, the Yugoslav German Party.

The German MPs in the Yugoslav Parliament promoted a two-pronged political programme pressing both cultural and agricultural claims. Particular attention was given to building a strong German-language secondary school network, for which the *Kulturbund* had already drawn the main outlines. As regarded land reform, the *Schwaben* were generally in favour of it, their only demand being that it should also include the small German peasantry in possession of very little land and landless day workers. Although initially allied with the Radical Party, the Germans gradually dissociated themselves from the centralizing forces in the Yugoslav parliament, siding with Radić's Croat Peasant Party in pressing claims for regional autonomy. The final rupture occurred in 1924, when the arch-centralizer Svetozar Pribičević, leader of the Vojvodina Serbs, was made Minister of Education and closed down the German *Kulturbund*. [14]

The war, territorial partition and the resulting waves of emigration into and out of the new states decapitated the intelligentsia of Banat minorities. The first to opt out of Yugoslavia and for their 'mother country' were the upper- and middle-class intellectuals, who were politically the most self-conscious and socially the most mobile. Whether political idealists or simply ambitious for powerful office, middle- and upper-class Romanians and Hungarians seized the opportunity offered by the Peace Treaties and opted for the Brave New World of enlarged Romania and rump Hungary respectively. Unless economic conditions became untenable, the land-tilling bulk of these minorities remained in the new state and made do.[15]

The remaining members of a Romanian middle class in the Yugoslav Banat adapted to the new political circumstances and in 1922 joined forces to form a Romanian Party. Their programme started with a declaration of political allegiance to the new state and an expressed wish for good relations with all the powers that brought about the post-war order and in particular with Romania and Czechoslovakia. Claims similar to those of other minorities were articulated regarding the preservation of ethnic identity, cultural and civic rights, and the use of vernacular languages in local administration. Prominent on the Romanians' political programme was the agrarian reform. Just like their Swabian colleagues, Romanian politicians stressed the necessity

of an equitable distribution of land which would raise the poor, landless peasantry from below the breadline. To this they added the demand for phasing in the soaring taxes resulting from the land reform and decreasing those on basic products used by the peasantry.[16]

The Romanian Party had its powerbase in southern Banat and relied for its votes on well-off Romanian peasantry and village intellectuals such as teachers and priests. The landless Romanian peasants remained, however, beyond their political reach. In the 1923 elections these cast their vote for the Democrats and the Socialists, who held out the promise of land rather than abstract 'cultural' rights. Annoyed with this lack of unity, the representatives of the Romanian Party complained in the party newspaper that 'today, when for the first time the peasants are given political freedom, they have taken the wrong path of Bolshevism instead'.[17] The rub was not so much the lack of unity (the Romanian Party did manage to send an MP, Dr Ioan Jianu, to the Yugoslav Parliament following the 1923 elections), as the fact that the split Romanian vote antagonized the Radical Party in the Banat, with whom the Romanian Party had allied itself.

In an unexpected reversal of political fate, the Hungarians of Yugoslavia were forced to swap places with their former political adversaries: the Serbs were now the dominant nation in the state while the Hungarians saw themselves reduced to the victimized role of a minority deemed unreliable and, even when moved by the best intentions, still regarded as enemies of the state. This was reflected by the failure of the Hungarian Party to send any MPs to the Yugoslav Parliament in 1923 while the much smaller Romanian minority managed to send one, and the *Schwaben* as many as eight representatives. In an eerie repeat of the gerrymandering and intimidation which characterized pre-war Hungarian politics, in the self-styled democratic Yugoslavia electoral lists were manipulated, Hungarian newspaper headquarters attacked and laid waste, public meetings and for a while the Hungarian Party itself prohibited under the suspicion of irredentism. In the Banat the solution to the Hungarian political dilemma came in the form of an alliance with the *Schwaben*. Alternatively, alliances were also made with the Radicals and the Democrats, which made it possible for further Hungarian politicians to enter the Belgrade Parliament.[18]

Although the new parliamentary system debarred Hungarians from political participation, the pre-war middle-class network of Hungarian cultural societies, casinos and newspapers continued to thrive and the national life of the community withdrew into cultural politics.

Royal Dictatorship and the March into War

Across Central and Eastern Europe post-war parliamentarianism proved short-lived: with a few exceptions, it went politically bankrupt and was replaced by authoritarian regimes within 20 years. In Yugoslavia, too, parliamentary politics failed to bring about the desired consensus and, by the end of the 1920s, the system floundered in obstructionism and factionalism. Obstructing proceedings as a means of making one's presence felt in Parliament was a game Croats and Slovenes had first learnt to play in the parliaments of Austria-Hungary. The intransigence of the Serbian political class, who was unwilling to compromise on the form of government and to forgo Serbian political and military pre-eminence in the state, met with the equally obstinate opposition of the Croats. Alliances and splits succeeded one another in rapid procession. Former enemies became allies, then lapsed into political enmity once more. The resulting political stalemate was brought to a head by the murder of the Croat Peasant Party leader Stjepan Radić by a Montenegrin MP in 1928. One year later, King Alexander, who had had enough of the democratic debacle, proceeded to dissolve Parliament and the Constitution, to be replaced instead with an authoritarian monarchy. His eventual assassination by a Macedonian terrorist in Paris in 1934 brought Prince Regent Paul onto the throne and, for a short while, also brought back constitutional parliamentarism.

While the old generation of politicians had been playing their cards in the pre-war manner of gentlemanlike obstructionism, a new generation of radicalized youth was coming into being who had no time or patience for endless palaver and rushed in where their predecessors had feared to tread. Some of them were too young to have fought in the Great War and had not known the pre-1914 imperial world. Among the *Schwaben* of Vojvodina (including the Banat) this rift took the

institutionalized form of a conflict between the old politicians affiliated with the German *Kulturbund* and the German youth organized
into a Renewal Movement (*Erneuerungsbewegung*). The former had been
born and bred in Austria-Hungary and some were still imbued with
dynastic nostalgia for the Habsburg Emperor. Politically they represented the well-off Swabian peasantry and middle classes of Vojvodina
and favoured a measured, 'step-by-step' approach to achieving political goals. By contrast, the *Erneuerers* did not look back nostalgically
to the Habsburg world but rather looked up to the 'doers' of their
time, the National Socialists who had come to power in Germany in
1933, or closer to home, the *Nationalsozialistische Erneuerungsbewegung
der Deutschen in Rumänien*, the organization of Romanian Germans on
which the Vojvodina movement was patterned.[19]

The Yugoslav Communists were forced into becoming an underground organization after they had been declared illegal in the early
1920s. The first interwar elections in which they took part showed
their appeal to the poor peasants and disenfranchised population of
Vojvodina. As has been pointed out, if anything, the criminalization of
the Communists and the labelling of all actions contrary to the established order as Communist or Bolshevik by the ruling elites helped
increase the appeal and membership of the Communists. Given their
internationalist outlook, they were perhaps the only political group of
any significance that truly represented the Yugoslav ideal.

The Great Depression and the outbreak of the Second World War
exacerbated the existing rifts in Yugoslav society and politics. Economic
problems, which the Western Allies were not able to help with, drove
Yugoslavia into the German sphere of influence. Economic dependency on the German *Reich* soon turned into political dependency. This
was not only the case in Yugoslavia. Romania followed a similar trajectory for the same economic reasons, to which, as we shall see in
the next chapter, was added the conundrum of dealing with major
territorial losses. The Yugoslav government adhered to the Tripartite
Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan on 25 March 1941, a decision which ran against the better judgement of most of the Yugoslav
political class and engendered opposition. Following the same merry-
go-round of political action and reaction, the Regency was deposed by

a bloodless military coup only two days later. This had far-reaching consequences in the context of the war and the freshly signed alliance with Nazi Germany. The coup antagonized Hitler, who decided to invade Yugoslavia and thus wipe the last 'Versailles construct' from the European map (it started with Czechoslovakia, continued with Romania, and ended with Yugoslavia).[20]

The Yugoslav Banat in the Second World War

Following the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Nazis, there came into being an Independent State of Croatia, a puppet state run by Croatian fascists, the Ustaša, under the supervision of the *Reich*. The rest of the territory was divided among Germany and its allies, Hungary and Bulgaria. Together with Serbia, the Banat was occupied by the Germans and remained under direct German military rule until the end of the war.

The story of the Second World War in the Banat as in the rest of Yugoslavia is one of state-directed atrocities. As Stevan Pavlowitch put it, 'the conquerors had not only destroyed the Yugoslav state; they had set its components against each other in an unprecedented way.'[21] A well-loved myth, especially widespread after the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, views Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe in general as a boiling cauldron of perennial, deep-seated ethnic hatreds pitting one backward community against another. What is overlooked is that the mass murders in Yugoslavia during World War II and after the fall of Communism came about as a result of high-level state inter-vention – the German occupiers, in the former case, and Communist elites trying to reinvent themselves by playing the nationalist card, in the latter.

The Banat was carved out of Vojvodina and kept under German control due to fears that Germany's allies, Hungary and Romania, might start quarrelling over it.[22] It became an important power base for the Germans not least because of the local German popula-tion, who welcomed the German troops and collaborated with them. The hopes of Vojvodina *Schwaben* had been that, by dismantling Yugoslavia, the Germans would grant them an autonomous territory

of their own, which would bring together once again all the Swabians from the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire. The pragmatic division of Yugoslavia amongst the *Reich* and its allies soon put an end to such hopes. The only measures the Germans took that were in the least reminiscent of the region's Habsburg past were essentially strategic and had nothing to do with the wishes or welfare of the *Schwaben*. As mentioned above, the separation of the Banat from the rest of Vojvodina was effected, not out of a wish to resuscitate the former Habsburg province, but to keep at bay Hungarian and Romanian territorial claims; *Schwaben* were promoted to positions of authority under the Nazi administration of the Banat but they were also the ones who bore the brunt of war-time taxation; a local SS volunteer corps, the 7th SS Freiwilligen-Gebirgsdivision Prinz Eugen, was set up in the Banat, which enlisted as many as 20,000 men. Some of the recruits joined of their own free will; others were simply forced into it.[23]

The Jewish question was summarily solved in the Yugoslav Banat by the deportation first of men, then of women and children, who perished in various death camps as part of the Final Solution, so that of the 4,200 Banat Jews only 482 survived the war. In the Banat the first concentration camp was opened at Pančevo, the town which used to host the former headquarters of the German Banat Border Regiment under Habsburg rule. The fate of the Roma, which was left in the hands of the local authorities, was equally grim, as was that of captured partisans and their families.[24]

Once the vicious circle of violence, retaliation and repression was set into motion, the combination of fear and animosity served to perpetuate and exacerbate it. *Schwaben*- and Hungarian-baiting before the German invasion of Yugoslavia was paid back later under Nazi administration. The Serbs massacred by the Nazis and their collaborators were avenged at the end of the war when the Soviet-supported Communists gained the upper hand and retaliated against German and Hungarian population. This was not about ancient ethnic hatreds flaring up once the constitutional, democratic order had broken down, but rather about the occupation of the Yugoslav territory by a military power headed by an extreme right-wing regime, which propelled to power the local fascist and Nazi movements, established a repressive

administration predicated on fear and racial hatred and used social and ethnic cleavages to its own advantage. Even in the most peaceful of communities, violence sets a precedent and becomes contagious and difficult to stave off once perpetrated. As Rudolf Klein pointed out in the case of the massacres of Novi Sad in the Bácska County, which had been under Hungarian rule during the war, 'Hungarian army brutality murdered Serbian and Jewish civilians on the frozen Danube in Novi Sad. The perpetrators withdrew to Hungary proper in October 1944 and locals had to foot the bill: Tito's partisans executed tens of thousands of ethnic Hungarians in the region.'[25]

The Yugoslav Banat was by no means an ideal, brotherly community of perfectly integrated ethnicities. Tensions and grievances, both social and ethnic, had always existed, just as in any other community. The ambivalence of multi-ethnic communities is humorously captured by Claudio Magris in his Danube travelogue. Here he presents a boisterous octogenarian by the name of Grandma Anka, a Serb from Weißkirchen, or Bela Crkva, in the Serbian Banat, who was born at the turn of the century and boasted several marriages and many more courtships (among the latter was the aforementioned Romanian MP Dr Jianu) and who now in her proud old age acted as cicerone for the Italian professor of German language and literature during his travels in Yugoslavia and Romania in the 1970s:

> In all fraternal official statements, the various ethnic groups are constantly clapping each other on the back and declaiming each other's best qualities. In Grandma Anka, who speaks all the languages, the different nationalities, on the other hand, overlap and clash. [...] 'Who ever saw a green horse or an intelligent Serb?' Grandma Anka, who quotes this [Romanian proverb] to me without resentment, is of ancient Serbian stock. [...] On our way to Bela Crkva we pass through the Rumanian village of Straža, and this gives her the opportunity – forgetting her own beloved Romanian grandmother – to call the Romanians thieves and ragamuffins, without so much as a sandal between them, among whom her father drove his cart with a flaming torch in one hand and a pistol in the other. As she runs down

the Romanians, she pays tribute to the orderly, hard-working Germans; but a little later, devoutly recalling the 'Romanian courtliness' of President Popescu, former Chief Justice of the court in Bela Crkva, she says that the fine conduct of the Germans frequently concealed pig-headedness and dishonest greed, and she calls them 'Romany rabble, worse than gypsies who now swagger around in a Mercedes'.[26]

Grandma Anka's prejudices and passionate self-contradiction are those of any community and go back to a time before political correctness gave the impression that everybody respects everybody else's cultural space and 'celebrates difference'. The point that has been made about Yugoslavia and which is worth making in the case of the Banat as well is that the difference between full-scale massacre and peaceful cohabitation is not the number of ethnicities or even their grievances against one another, but rather the legal and administrative framework in which the community is embedded. In default of an equitable state mechanism dispensing justice and ensuring that social tensions are kept in check, violence and personal justice are likely to become the order of the day.

CHAPTER 11

THE BANAT IN ROMANIA

Much of the former Habsburg province of the Banat of Temesvár was attached to the enlarged Romanian state after 1919. Romanian diplomats asked for the whole of the Banat at the Paris Peace Conference and finally got two-thirds of it, which was perhaps the wisest decision to make as it secured the least possible number of minorities on either side of the border. Like the Yugoslav Banat, the Romanian side of the province was to be integrated into a new state and subjected to a wholly new administration, which ran against the grain of the social, political and economic developments it had known for last couple of centuries. All roads led to Budapest and Vienna and pre-war economy and administration had been cast in accordance with the needs of the Austro-Hungarian state. The impact of this change of hands was even greater in the case of the Romanian Banat as it contained the main economic centres of southern Hungary: Temesvár, from now on to be officially known by its Romanian name of Timişoara, and Arad. The most important towns of the Yugoslav Banat, Vršac, Pančevo (Panciova) and Bela Crkva (Weißkirchen), bore no comparison to Timişoara and were predominantly Serbian and as such easier to integrate. Like its Yugoslav neighbour, the Romanian state faced the unenviable task of welding together the newly acquired pieces of territory into a coherent, functioning whole. This was to be achieved within the framework of a centralized nation-state run from Bucharest. From the new capital were handed down land reform, minority policies and administrative

initiatives, so that the Banat was stripped overnight of its former status of strategic imperial borderland and became instead a national backwater.

Inkblots and Fears

The introduction of minority treaties as mandatory accompaniments of the territorial reorganization in post-war East-Central Europe raised eyebrows among the prospective signatories and met with fierce resistance. The reasons behind such resistance were different but the reactions were roughly the same. The controversial minority stipulations acted very much in the manner of a Rorschach inkblot test, revealing the internal issues and fears of political elites in the new states. As we have seen in the previous chapter, with Yugoslav statesmen the skeleton in the cupboard was the Albanian population in southern Serbia, whom the new Yugoslav state feared they might have to recognize as a minority rather than pass off as Islamicized Serbs. The minorities that the Romanian state acquired with their new territories were no less variegated than the ones the Yugoslavs had to contend with. By the end of the Peace Conference, the Romanian state had doubled in size, having received Transylvania and the Banat from the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, Bukovina from the Austrian half, Bessarabia from the Russian Empire, and southern Dobrogea from Bulgaria. This presupposed a sizeable minority intake consisting of Hungarians, two types of Germans (Saxons in Transylvania and *Schwaben* in the Banat), Serbs, Turks, Russians and Jews.

Of all the possible spectres that the minority treaties could have conjured up among the Romanian politicians, the most ominous was the perceived Jewish threat. It was not fear of irredentism among the new and numerous Hungarian minority that determined the Romanian diplomats to reject minority stipulations during the peace conference, but rather the perceived threat of an international Jewish conspiracy. This was part and parcel of the vicious circle of anti-Semitism in pre-war Romania. Although the Treaty of Berlin, which recognized Romania's independence in 1879, prescribed to the new state as part of minority protection stipulations that it should emancipate its Jewish

population, this remained a dead letter. During the Great War the Jewish minority, who had been denied citizenship rights and whose appeals for redress constantly fell on deaf ears, turned in 1917 to the occupying German armies for help. This was taken as proof of their treachery by the beleaguered Romanian authorities, who thus gained an additional reason for suspecting their Jews of foul play.

Worried by the predicament of Jews primarily in the Tsarist Empire, the American President suggested the inclusion of minority clauses in the Paris Peace Treaties which would prevent the recurrence of Jewish pogroms of the kind that took place in Bessarabia in 1905 and in Russian Poland. The Romanian diplomats were right in suspecting that the Jewish question lay at the root of the minority treaties; they were wrong, however, in imagining a general Jewish conspiracy aimed to undermine the Romanian state: they had been debarring their own Jewish inhabitants from basic citizen's rights for so long that they were by now completely blind to the justness of their demands.[1]

It was in this climate of grudging acceptance of minority rights and reluctant extension of state citizenship to all non-Romanian and non-Orthodox inhabitants of Romania that interwar statesmen set about the task of integrating the Banat into their state. And as old habits die hard, especially when they are ossified into legal categories, the time-honoured division between Romanians and foreigners carried over into the interwar period and shaped the politics of the new country.

Life in a New State

The 1920s were years of recovery and consolidation in the Romanian Kingdom and the Banat formed no exception. In the first years after the war a new Romanian system of administration was put into place and the entire economy of the region was reoriented towards Bucharest. The former imperial-royal towns of the Banat had now become part of the 'provinces' of the Old Kingdom, which meant that they lost the Austrian and Hungarian markets and, at the same time, found it difficult to secure new markets within the new state, given the general perception that 'foreign products are the best'.[2] The influx of *Regateers* (officials from the Old Kingdom, or *Regat*) who manned the

new administration was resented equally by the Romanian majority of the population and the minorities, who compared them with the more efficient Austro-Hungarian administration.[3]

As in Yugoslavia, the policy which made the presence of the new state felt even in the remotest corner of the new province was land reform. In Romania this took place in 1921, although a blueprint of it had been drawn up during the latter stages of the war, and varied across the new territories: in Bessarabia, the former Tsarist province, a decree of land expropriation and redistribution was passed very quickly and in a radical form for fear of Bolshevik contamination of the dis-gruntled local peasantry; in the Old Kingdom the reform had politi-cal undertones, the Liberal Party then in power seeking to undermine their political opponents, the great landowners forming the power base of the Conservative Party; while in the Banat and Transylvania, where the peasantry was comparatively well-off, the expropriations took on an additional national tinge given the coincidence of social and ethnic cleavages, with a predominantly Hungarian landowning class and a predominantly Romanian peasantry.[4]

Degrees of Integration

The new state extended its network of public servants over the Banat, more often than not ruffling local sensibilities by appointing *Regateers*, that is, people from the Old Kingdom or *Regat*. This was in keeping with the centralizing policies of the Liberal government which was at the helm of the state until 1928. The new state left untouched, how-ever, the allegiance of its minorities. Romanian could not be learnt overnight and life in an all-German or all-Serbian village meant that little interaction with the Romanian-speaking functionaries of the new state actually occurred. Several generations were needed to bridge the language and cultural gap between the new authorities and the Banat minorities. The old generation remained anchored in the ways of the Habsburg Monarchy.

While reminiscing about her childhood in the Banat, the German writer and Nobel-Prize winner Herta Müller described the world in which her grandparents lived after the Great War. They were

well-off Swabian farmers, who had spent all their life in Nitzkydorf, a small Swabian village in central Banat: 'My grandparents did not speak a word of Romanian. [Their village] had been part of Austria-Hungary, so they spoke German and Hungarian. They never learnt any Romanian. [. . .] I think my grandparents never really accepted this state. On the walls of their house there still hung pictures of [Emperor] Franz Joseph; at the cemetery they had wreaths [. . .] with cameos of Franz Joseph and Virgin Mary', imprinted with Hungarian inscriptions. 'My grandparents went on living in the times of the Monarchy; they never quite warmed up to the new state.' The first of Herta Müller's family to learn any Romanian was her mother, who acquired a smattering of the state language to get by in the market place, on public transport or, after the Second World War, to interact with the new village bureaucracy sent in by the Communist regime. The writer herself learnt Romanian as a foreign language and, when she went up to town to study, felt as if she were going abroad.[5] Similar experiences marked life in other non-Romanian communities in the new state. If in non-Romanian villages the language barrier was due mostly to rural seclusion, in towns and cities, which had been dominated initially by German and later by Hungarian, the new state language was perceived as an artificial imposition. For instance, there was little incentive for Hungarians to learn the language of a state that had been forced upon them, a state which had demoted them from their previous status of dominant nation and whose historical *raison d'être* they did not accept; a state, moreover, whose National Day, celebrating the 1918 unification of Romanian-inhabited provinces, coincided with the Hungarians' national tragedy, the dismemberment of the Hungarian Kingdom by the Treaty of Trianon.[6]

For some of the new minority citizens the transition to life in a new state was a fortunate one. Some knowledge of Romanian could make the difference between dismissal from a previous job or promotion to a new and better one. As the entomologist Frederic König remembers, 'after the Union my father kept his job and later became chief tax collector in the Fabrik district [of Timişoara]. He was a man of many talents. He attended a technical university in Budapest for a year and could not cope with it and returned home, where he became a public

servant.'[7] Magdalena Koşar (née Arendt), the daughter of a successful German confectioner in Timişoara, Iuliu Arendt, reminisced about her father's success story in interwar Romania: '[We spoke] German in our family. And since we had a confectionary shop, which was open to everyone, Hungarian and Romanian were spoken there as well. [...] If you ask an old person from Timişoara, they will certainly have heard about *Cofetăria Arendt* (Arendt Confectionary Shop). Our kitchen was big and spacious and Father always made a point of buying new machinery whenever it appeared: contraptions for whipping the cream, kneading the dough and for grinding. There were many Jews from Vienna [in Timişoara] at that time and they showed him the latest machinery. My father bought it and modernized his kitchen.'[8]

In a mirror image of minority life in the Yugoslav Banat, the Serbian communities of the Romanian Banat were bereft of their intelligentsia, who understandably preferred to migrate across the border into Yugoslavia, where more opportunities arose for personal, professional and political advancement. The Serbs left behind lingered on, relying on confessional schools for the maintenance of their language and culture and on a patchwork of village intellectuals for meagre political representation.[9]

Disentangling history proved more difficult, because more emotionally charged, than expropriating land in the Banat and Transylvania. In his voyage through Hungary and Romania in the 1930s, Patrick Leigh Fermor visited the castle of John Hunyadi, a fifteenth-century Transylvanian Voivode, who kept the Ottomans at bay for years and famously defeated Sultan Mehmet II in the Battle of Belgrade. Of Vlach, that is, Romanian origin, Hunyadi had been a brilliant Generalissimo in the Hungarian army and Regent-Governor (1446–1453) of the Kingdom of Hungary. His son, Matthias Corvinus, would become one of the most celebrated Hungarian kings. Accompanying Fermor on his visit in the Banat was Count Jenő Teleki, a member of the Hungarian nobility, who owned land in north-eastern Banat. They visited the Hunyadi Castle situated in southern Transylvania and the Romanian explanatory notices presenting Hunyadi as a Romanian hero with no mention of Hungary sent the Count spluttering: 'They seem to think the Treaty of Trianon awarded them Hungarian history

as well as territory.' To which the Count's Romanian wife added: 'I expect the Hungarians underplayed the Romanian side.'[10] This type of appropriation of history was and still is typical of the region, where for a long time historical precedent was used as a political trump card to solve social problems and political inequalities.

The Banat in Interwar Romanian Politics

Of the countries that appeared, or enlarged their territory, in East-Central Europe after the Great War, Romania had, on the face of it, the best chances of achieving political consensus and genuine democracy. It was one of the winners of the Paris Treaties and the national unification which came with the enlarged territory created, at least in theory, the basis for a national consensus. Unlike Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, it had no insurmountable problems dealing with ethnic differences between the attached provinces. Although it did acquire a considerable number of new minorities, the majority of the Romanian population was reassuringly compact and did not pose problems even remotely comparable with those posed by the Serbo-Croat tug-of-war in Yugoslavia. The land reform pursued in Romania was one of the most radical in the region and seemed to pave the way for the formation of a class of prosperous small landholders. Things turned out rather differently in reality.

A party system had existed in Romania since the formation of the state in the mid-nineteenth century. But this political precedent was based on a limited franchise. The universal male vote introduced after the war threatened to unsettle the hegemony of entrenched political powers, the Liberals and Conservatives. As a result, most of the interwar elections were rigged and the party forming the government usually won the elections they organized. As the Conservatives were politically annihilated by the land reform of 1921, the Liberals were faced with new opposition from the National Peasant Party, which resulted out of a merger of the Romanian National Party of pre-war Hungary and the Peasant Party of the old *Regat*. These sought to improve the plight of the peasantry and got their chance in 1928 when, following the death of King Ferdinand and the formation of a regency awaiting the

coming-of-age of his grandson King Michael, the National Peasant Party was entrusted with the organization of elections. Apart from the 1919 elections, these were the first and, as it turned out, the last free elections in interwar Romania.

The Banat, as a former Austro-Hungarian territory, had behind it a tradition of pre-war party politics in which the nationality issue went hand in hand with social grievances. Pre-1914, those parts of the Romanian population who were able to vote according to the limited Hungarian franchise had been staunch supporters of the Romanian National Party. Within the framework of the new Romanian state after the war, the Banat as well as the Transylvanian Romanians continued to support this party after its merger with the *Regat* Peasant Party in 1926.

The *Schwaben* for their own part rallied around their former leaders from the time of pre-war Hungarian politics and sought to close ranks with the German minority of Transylvania, the Evangelical Saxons, with whom political unity proved difficult to attain, due to cultural and religious differences. As Hugh Seton-Watson pointed out, life in Greater Romania was beneficial for the German minority in the Banat not least because the Romanian authorities, in their attempt to diminish the numbers of their Hungarian minority, actively tried to re-Germanize the Magyarized *Schwaben*.[11]

Just as in the case of the Yugoslav *Schwaben*, the political orientation of the Banat Germans was split along generational lines. The older generation found its political views represented by Hans Otto Roth, the Saxon leader of the German Party in Romania. As he had been formed in the political culture of Austria-Hungary, he championed the cause of the German minority in the new state by seeking what could not be achieved in pre-war Austria-Hungary: a welding of national and state loyalty (*Volkstreue und Staatstreue*). This political line of full integration of the German minority translated into the willingness of the German Party to form political alliances with other Romanian parties in order to attain their objectives.[12] Unhappy with the progress made by their conservative political elders, the young generation of Romanian Germans turned to more radical solutions and, spurred on by the ascent to power of the Nazis in Germany, founded

their own movement on the basis of national socialist principles. The *Erneuerungsbewegung*, or renewal movement, the brainchild of the Transylvanian Saxon Fritz Fabritius, made inroads among the younger generation of *Schwaben* in the Romanian Banat and, as pointed out in the previous chapter, provided a model of political organization for the young generation of *Schwaben* in the Yugoslav Banat as well.

The equivalent show-stealers on the Romanian political scene in the Banat were the supporters of the right-wing movement known as the *Iron Guard*. Its name changed several times and but the term 'Legionaries' (from its previous name, the Legion of Archangel Michael) stuck. Just like the German *Erneuerungsbewegung*, they were a radical youthful movement opposed to the corruption and inefficiency of the old elite, promoting a new style of politics aimed at rejuvenating the nation and ridding it of its social and political problems through action, with or without violence, instead of languishing in parliament amidst endless sterile bickering. The vision they held out was one of assertive, unadulterated action and radical change for the better. They were the harbingers of a politics of the 'here and now'. Their brand of Romanian nationalism was fiercely anti-Semitic and tightly interwoven with Orthodoxy, viewed as a fundamental trait of Romanian national identity.

The Legionaries were like none of the older politicians. They had punchy slogans, which even the humblest peasant could understand (*Omul şi pogonul* – One Man, One Acre), and, more importantly, they made things happen. In charge of the Banat region was one of the prominent leaders of their movement, Horia Sima. Originally from southern Transylvania, he had spent time in the Banat as a Romanian teacher and journalist in Caransebeş (Karánsebes), the headquarters of the former Romanian Banat Border Regiment. His Legionaries went to villages in the Banat, built houses and fountains, helped bring in the crops, worked and sang, and showed the common people a face of politics they had never seen before: populism was being invented under their very eyes.[13] The Legionary movement was not confined to the Romanian Banat and had a strong following among Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat as well, especially among the village intelligentsia, priests and teachers. This, as we shall see further on, came in handy

when the Legionaries' relationship with King Carol II and his successor, Marshal Ion Antonescu, soured and they had to seek refuge from governmental repression.[14]

A Country of Foreigners, or the Xenophobic Thirties

The 1930s saw the rise of Nazism and the sharpening of national and social divides under the pressure of the Great Depression. In Romania politics veered towards the extreme right as the population witnessed the failure of governmental economic policies, which made the slogans of the Iron Guard ring truer than ever in their indictment of the corrupt political class. Apart from misguided reform measures (such as the National Peasant Party concentrating on the situation of the peasants owning big and medium plots of land, as opposed to giving their attention to the majority of rural proletariat), the economic slump dealt a fatal blow to good policy measures as well, which could have improved the fate of the peasantry as a whole but never got a chance to take off. To make things worse, King Ferdinand's son, Carol II, who had opted out of his right to the throne due to a morganatic relationship, decided to return to Romania in 1930 and take politics into his own hands. One year after King Alexander decreed a royal dictatorship in Yugoslavia, the 'Prodigal Son' of the Hohenzollern dynasty was returning to Romania not to save the party system but to break it. And break it he did, by scandalizing and alienating the more moderate leaders of the Liberal and National Peasant Parties, causing splits and favouring extremist nationalist movements such as the Iron Guard and A.C. Cuza's National Christian Defence League. He did this to satisfy his appetite for power while modelling himself on Mussolini, whom he admired. The high point of Carol's political scheming was the appointment of the Goga government of 1937–1938, which did the dirty work for him by introducing far-reaching anti-Semitic legislation. The fall of this government was to pave the way for King Carol's dictatorship in 1938.

The impact of the xenophobic policies handed down from Bucharest was felt most keenly in the urban areas of the Banat. As urban centres had been nodal points in the former Austro-Hungarian administration,

it stood to reason that a non-Romanian population predominated there. With the Constitution of 1923 the Romanian political class had reached a grudging compromise between nationalism and the practicalities of managing their newly acquired minorities by stretching out the old concept of Romanian citizenship to include the non-Romanian and non-Orthodox. The legislation of the late 1930s, however, reverted to the pre-1918 distinction between 'true-blue' Romanians and foreigners. In 1936 the journal of the Social Institute for the Banat and Crişana took stock of factory owners and employees in Timişoara, drawing up statistical charts which divided them according to ethnic origin (Romanians, Jews, Hungarians, Germans and others) and totalled the number of foreigners in a separate column. In this context 'foreigners' did not mean foreign citizens, but rather Romanian citizens who were not ethnic Romanians. This was the consequence of a 1934 law which stipulated that, in every place of employment, 80 per cent of the workers and 50 per cent of the management should be Romanian. A new type of protectionism had thus come into being which postulated a new, oxymoronic category of citizens, foreign Romanian citizens, against whom the 'genuine' Romanian citizens had to be protected.[15]

Throughout the interwar period the use of a language other than the state language in daily affairs rendered the minorities of the Banat unreliable from the point of view of the Romanian authorities. The Hungarians were the usual suspects, closely followed by the Jews. Most Jews had international commercial contacts and conducted their business in Hungarian or German as they had done for years and years under the former imperial rule. This made them difficult to supervise and the foreign languages they used rendered them inadvertently obscure and as such doubly suspicious in the eyes of the Romanian secret police.[16] The state's failure to enlist the allegiance of the non-Romanians cast them in the role of potential traitors and wasted an historical opportunity of reaching a consensus. The same happened in interwar Yugoslavia with the Hungarian minority. The same had been the case in pre-1914 Hungary as well. The successor states repeated the same mistake as their imperial predecessors.

This was only the thin end of the wedge as, by the outbreak of the Second World War, what had begun as state interventionism aimed

at remedying historical injustices done to Romanians under imperial rule turned into a witch-hunt directed against the said foreigners and in particular the Jews. In 1938 most of the Jewish population was stripped of its Romanian citizenship and thrown into a legal limbo, which preceded the social exclusion and physical elimination of subsequent wartime policies.

The Crucible of War

The question of the Banat was reopened during the Second World War after Romania joined the Axis Powers and Yugoslavia was dismantled in 1941. The apparent paradox of countries such as Romania and Yugoslavia, which owed their formation and enlargement to the Entente powers, finding themselves in the opposite camp 20 years later can be explained in terms of the economic and international configurations applying from the 1930s onwards. When the Great Depression struck, the former Entente powers adopted protectionist measures, which gave Germany a chance to extend its economic influence over Central and Eastern Europe. By the outbreak of the war, the economies of both Romania and Yugoslavia were vitally dependent on German capital and markets. Economic dependency was, in this context, one step away from political dependency. To this was added the political vacuum caused by the break-down of international treaties. These were shown not to be worth the paper they were written on when Germany marched unimpeded into Czechoslovakia and dismembered it in 1939. Romania's turnabout occurred in 1940, when it lost Bessarabia to the Soviet Union and northern Transylvania to Hungary, which amounted to one-third of the territory of the Romanian state. King Carol II was forced to abdicate under pressure from the street and in his place a military dictatorship led by General Ion Antonescu was established, who ruled with the help of the Iron Guard. In 1941, after a failed rebellion, the Iron Guard was made illegal and excluded from government. The Legionaries had got out of hand to such an extent that not even Hitler and Nazi Germany were willing to back them up anymore.

Romania signed the Tripartite Pact in November 1940. The pact, initially signed in September 1940, brought together the three Axis

Powers, Germany, Italy and Japan, and was subsequently adhered to by a number of other countries that gravitated into the orbit of the three. The Yugoslav government that signed the Pact in March 1941 was overturned by a British-aided coup d'état, which in turn triggered Germany's invasion of Yugoslavia and the dismantling of the country. In this context the Banat became once again a bone of contention, this time between Axis allies, Romania and Hungary. The nationalism whipped up by almost ten years of right-wing politics in Romania and fuelled by the sudden loss of large swathes of territory as well as the initial intention of Germany to award the Yugoslav Banat to Hungary revived the old Romanian claims over the whole Banat. With the old treaties dead and buried and France, its main supporter, defeated by Germany, Romania fell back on the only remaining card it had to play, that of ethnic nationalism. On this basis, General Antonescu challenged Germany's decision to give the Yugoslav Banat to the Hungarians. This resulted in a compromise solution, which left the Yugoslav Banat under direct German military rule, despite it being of no particular strategic importance to the Germans.

As Rebecca Haynes has pointed out, a possible binding medium between the two halves of the Banat may have been the Legionary movement, which had gone underground after January 1941 and found supporters and a safe haven across the border in the Yugoslav Banat. Horia Sima, the leader of the Legionaries and former regional leader for the Banat, acknowledged in his writings that the fall of Yugoslavia and the disappearance of the border 'allowed the Legionaries in Yugoslavia to enter and leave Romania at will'. After their failed rebellion in Bucharest in January 1941, many Legionaries found refuge among the nationalist Romanians of the Yugoslav Banat. Given existing fears that a second Legionary rebellion against Antonescu could start in the Banat, there is a possibility, Haynes hypothesizes, that the Romanian claims for the Yugoslav Banat were also politically motivated, as a way of 'eradicating a significant outpost of potential Legionary resistance' to Antonescu's regime.[17]

The two halves of the Banat found themselves all but reunited at the beginning of the war for, although the Yugoslav Banat remained under German control, the de facto obliteration of the border and

Romania's military alliance with Germany made both halves of the province equally subject to Axis influence. The juxtaposition of the fate of the Jewish population in the two halves of the Banat illustrates the difference between Hitler's and Antonescu's rule. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Jewish question was summarily 'solved' in the Nazi-occupied Yugoslav Banat. Deportations to death camps started almost straight after the occupation and a mere tenth of the total Jewish population survived the war. In the Romanian Banat this did not happen. The Antonescu regime instituted mixed policies regarding the Romanian Jews. The ones in the Soviet-occupied provinces of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina were deported, while the Jews in the Old *Regat*, the Banat and southern Transylvania were allowed to stay.

This was by no means a gesture of magnanimity but rather the consequence of Antonescu's ambiguous personality and his assessment of the war situation. Unlike Hitler, Antonescu lent an ear to appeals from the Jewish community and from leading Romanian politicians, such as Iuliu Maniu, in defence of the Romanian Jews. From the latest evidence and analyses, it appears that what swayed Antonescu in favour of hanging on to the Jews was the prospect of Germany losing the war. As the rationale behind Romania entering the war on the side of the Axis had been the retrieval of lost territories, in particular northern Transylvania, Iuliu Maniu, the prestigious leader of the National Peasant Party, found the best possible plea for persuading Antonescu of the necessity of not deporting the Jewish population: 'should Germany lose the war and should the Transylvanian question be settled at future peace negotiations, how could Romania justify its claims, having deported its Transylvanian Jews, against the claims of Hungary, which had not deported them?'[18] So it came about that in the Romanian Banat, the Jews were spared the ordeal of deportation, although they remained subject to anti-Semitic policies. Jews being deemed unreliable citizens were exempted from military service and were instead drafted into community, and later on, forced labour battalions and worked on roads and railways.[19]

At the other end of the Banat ethnic spectrum, the *Schwaben*, just like the Saxons in Transylvania, became a privileged community in

the context of Romania's war-time alliance with Nazi Germany. The community's actual levels of support for National Socialism are not easy to gauge and this, as we shall see in the next chapter, contributed to the wholesale criminalization of all ethnic Germans in post-war Romania. By 1943 10 per cent of the total German population of Romania had been recruited into the *Waffen SS* and the German *Wehrmacht*. Recent scholarship has pointed out that resistance against Nazism did occur in the German communities of Romania in particular among the Banat *Schwaben*, 'who deserted the SS in greater numbers than any other ethnic German group'.[20] Survivors' accounts of the drafting of Jews into labour battalions in the Banat testify to the good will and humanity shown to them by German and Romanian villagers.[21] On the dark side of the community were, however, the 'cemetery-makers'[22], as Herta Müller would call them, that is those Germans who joined the *Waffen SS* out of conviction and participated in war crimes. And somewhere in the middle of this black-and-white picture, there is the wide, grey swathe of Germans drafted into the allied German and Romanian armies, who were given no choice before being dragged into the war and its horrors just like any other able-bodied male citizen of the time.

CHAPTER 12

THE COMMUNIST EXPERIENCE

Out of the War and into Communism

The story of the Banat after the Second World War is closely linked to that of the Communist Party in Romania and Yugoslavia and the ensuing Cold War. The end of the war found the two countries on the side of the Western Powers and under partial or total Soviet military occupation. Romania's change of course came about with a coup d'état on 23 August 1944, when Marshal Ion Antonescu was arrested and replaced with a Communist-dominated government. This steered the country out of its alliance with Germany and into the Allied Camp just as the Soviet armies were closing in, on a counter-offensive against the retreating Axis armies. Romanian Communists were to later deplore the timing of the coup d'état, which robbed them of the chance of posing as liberators of Romania on the coattails of the Soviets. Stalin's armies thus entered and occupied Romania, which was no longer a German ally but a 'friendly' country, albeit of recent conversion.

What the Romanian Communists could not do, their Yugoslav counterparts were able to. Throughout the war, dismembered Yugoslavia was the scene of violent clashes and reprisals brought about by confrontations between, on the one hand, the occupying German forces and the puppet regimes they put in place and, on the other hand, the two-pronged Yugoslav partisan movement, the Communists

and the Chetniks. The Chetniks, a right-wing nationalist and royalist Serbian paramilitary organization, envisaged a Greater Serbia at the end of the war and initially sought an agreement with the Allies, then swung to collaborate with the Nazis and the Serbian puppet regime in Belgrade, and intermittently considered joining forces with the Yugoslav Communists. By the end of the war, this weathercock strategy had lost them the support of the Allies, made a common front with the Communist partisans impossible, and converted the Chetniks into a repressive Nazi militia. By contrast, the Communists, led by Josip Broz Tito, took their orders from Moscow and firmly opposed any collaboration with the German regime, while seeking in vain to forge an alliance with the Chetniks. The massacres perpetrated across Yugoslavia by the Nazis and Ustaša (the Croatian fascists) as well as by the Serbian Chetniks gave an unexpected boost to the membership of the Yugoslav Communist Party. They were the only ones who actively fought against the occupying forces and held out the promise of postwar social and political reform beyond nationality barriers. Moreover, they succeeded in enlisting the loyalty of Serbs and non-Serbs alike by staving off the wave of vendettas engendered by the excesses of the Ustaša and Chetniks, while using the same violent means to eliminate their own political opponents.[1] Unlike in Romania's case, the Soviet army entered Yugoslavia as support forces for the local Communists on the understanding that after liberation command over the Yugoslav territory would be handed over to local civil authorities, which was duly done.

Two Communist regimes had come into power by 1948 in Bucharest and Belgrade. The Romanian Communists, who had been a puny organization during the interwar period with no more than 1,000 members to its name, were propelled to power by a combination of political shrewdness on their own part, weakness and disorganization on the part of the Romanian historical parties, and moral and material support lent to the Communists by the Soviets. In Yugoslavia, the Communists emerged from the war as national liberators, with their ranks increased as they enlisted popular support during the war. Well before the Soviet armies entered Yugoslav territory, the local Communists were already in control of a considerable part of

Yugoslav territory and consolidating their power base. In Romania abortive attempts were made to take up where the interwar parliamentary system had left off before the fateful apparition of Carol II on the political scene; in Yugoslavia there was no going back to the pre-war parliamentary stalemate, as the former political forces of Yugoslavia had discredited themselves before or during war, most of them being tainted by association with the Nazi regime. The only viable political vision was offered by the Communists.

Collective Guilt

With the retreat of the German army and administration a significant number of *Schwaben* left the territory of the Banat. There had been plans for removing the German population of Eastern Europe going back to 1939. When the tide of the war turned in 1944 and the Germans were forced to retreat before the advancing Soviet army, those plans became reality: most of the German population of Bukovina and Bessarabia, as well as the few colonists from Dobrogea on the Black Sea coast, were withdrawn. Romania's change of sides allowed the Soviet army to pass unimpeded and reach the Banat and Yugoslavia faster than the Germans expected. As a consequence, the withdrawal of the German population from the Banat took place in great haste and was only partially completed. Of the planned 215,000 *Schwaben* to be evacuated from the Banat as a whole, only 20,000 left the Yugoslav Banat and probably the equivalent number left the Romanian half of the province.[2] Those left behind became a lightning rod for official reprisals under the new authorities and for popular hatred accumulated during the war against all things German.

Wartime justice is never just. In both halves of the Banat, the Swabian community as a whole were condemned and stripped of all their possessions and civil rights. Many of the *Schwaben* had collaborated with the Nazi authorities, some willingly and out of conviction, others unwillingly, under coercion. As the new Soviet-backed authorities came into their own and set about establishing war guilt and meting out their justice, they were not going to engage in hair-splitting. The community was branded with 'collective guilt' and criminalized

as a whole. Once again the division of the Banat into a Romanian and a Yugoslav half impacted on the fate of the local population. Just as being a Jew in the Romanian or Yugoslav Banat had spelt the difference between life and death during the war when the Nazis were high and mighty, so after the war being a Swabian on the Romanian as opposed to the Yugoslav side of the border was once again a vital difference in terms of personal survival.

The fierceness of post-war repression mirrored the excesses and policies of war-time authorities. In both Romania and Yugoslavia, the property of the *Schwaben* who had fled was confiscated by the state and the remaining German population was isolated and excluded from public life. The difference lay in their subsequent predicament, which depended on the type of rule instituted in their half of the Banat. The Yugoslav Banat, having been occupied by the Yugoslav Liberation Army, came under military administration, which proceeded to executions and indiscriminate internment of *Schwaben* into concentration camps, irrespective of age or whether they were guilty of any crimes. As the great majority of men had been drafted into the German army and as such had not returned home, the majority of German population thus interned were below 16 and over 60. Although it appears that no extermination of the community as a whole was intended or planned by the Communist authorities, the fact of the matter remains that within four years (1944–1948) a third of the German population that happened to live in the territory under the control of the Popular Liberation Army died.[3]

Under the effective occupation of the Soviet Army, Romania did not intern its German-speaking population, it deported them instead. In 1945, of the remaining Swabian population of the Banat, all women between the age of 18 and 30 and all men between the age of 17 and 24, irrespective of whether they were guilty of anything, were deported to the Soviet Union to work in labour camps. No exceptions were made for the German Communists or for the *Schwaben* who had fought in the Romanian army during the war. Those who happened to be married to a Romanian, but not to a person of any other nationality, could remain. Thus, if you were a Swabian in the Romanian Banat, you were only deported if you were able to work.

Children and elderly people were spared the ordeal. In the Yugoslav Banat, you ended up in a concentration camp no matter what. As the Romanian Banat had not been savaged by war-time repression and its population had not been turned against one another, the orders received from Bucharest in the late summer of 1944 took a while to be put into effect. The Chief of the Gendarmerie in Schöndorf, a village in northern Banat, warned the local German community of the impending measures to be taken against them: 'I received orders to take care of you [the community was to be placed under surveillance] and to arrest political activists. I hope you will cover my back when the Germans return.'[4]

From Collective Guilt to Collectivization

Once in power, the post-war authorities of Romania and Yugoslavia set about solving the problem of land reform, which interwar governments had failed to successfully tackle. The time was ripe too, as many properties had been abandoned by the fleeing population and new legislation against war criminals made expropriation and land redistribution appear as an act of both social and political justice. In the Romanian Banat, the most affected were, once again, the German minority: firstly, because after the war Swabian property was expropriated in the name of the collective guilt and, secondly, because as prosperous farmers the *Schwaben* were likely to be in possession of more land and, as such, the main target of expropriations, irrespective of nationality. Just as in the war-time Yugoslav Banat there had been *Schwaben* who claimed to be Hungarians, rather than ethnic Germans, to avoid being drafted into the SS troops, so in the post-war Romanian Banat, some of the German population dug deep into their family tree to find traces of another nationality and thus opt out of their stigmatized German ethnicity. The inhabitants of a *Schwaben* village in north-western Banat, Triebswetter (Tomnatic), invoked their French roots going back to the Habsburg colonization of the village in 1772. Most of the colonists brought in at that time had come from the region of Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg. Luckily for them, records had been kept of individual lineage (the so-called

Ahnenpässe) based on church archive entries. More recently, around 1930, a local Francophile notary took it upon himself to conduct a village census which registered as French all those whose German names could be traced back to a French name (Tuttenuit, Papillon, Renard, Vive). By the middle of the nineteenth century most of the French speaking colonists had assimilated to the German environment of the *Schwaben*. As a descendant of Theresian colonists, Hans Damas remembers, 'My grandfather, who lived until he was 92 and died in 1930, could not speak with his grandmother. The old woman knew no German and he knew no French.' Apart from the distant memory of a French past, suddenly jogged by the threat of deportations at the end of the Second World War, the only French echoes in the lifestyle of the Tomnatic community linger on in their cuisine: they still cook '*calete*' (from the French *galette*) and eat frogs.[5]

Land redistribution changed the ethnic structure of the villages of the Banat. Colonists were brought in to occupy the expropriated houses and lands. In the Romanian Banat, as one of the Triebswetter villagers remembered: 'The Germans were left without home or land. Colonists came to live in every house, and you had to withdraw to one room. [They] put a colonist in every house in all the villages, and gave them three and a half hectares of land each, and we had none. They expropriated us to pay off the war debt.'[6] In the Yugoslav Banat, the end of the war had brought with it spontaneous population movements, so that the actual land reform and policy of colonization was preceded by illegal seizures of land and property belonging to people who had fled, which the new authorities in most cases merely acknowledged as a fait accompli. To these spontaneous colonizations, the Communists added several waves of colonists from the impoverished, land-starved regions of Yugoslavia.

Just as in the case of interwar land reform, the destruction of prosperous properties and sidelining of skilled farmers after the Second World War proved to be deleterious to local economy. A report of the Ploughmen's Front in Romania pointed out that 'by depriving the *Schwaben* of their rights, we have jeopardized an important element of production. When it comes to farming skills, the colonists are inferior to the *Schwaben*, being colonized without any prior selection. Some

colonists destroy the goods and waste the rural inventory.'[7] On the other side of the border, in Yugoslavia, the Communist authorities were forced to admit that their land reform led in the short run to stagnation and even a decrease in agricultural production. In Vojvodina the year 1947 saw a slump in production to 89 per cent of the pre-war average, which similarly had been brought about by the disappearance of the Swabian population and their replacement with poorly qualified settlers.[8]

Collectivization was forced through in Romania and Yugoslavia at roughly the same time, starting from 1949. In Romania all considerations for the plight of the peasantry were cast aside from the very beginning and violent recruitment into cooperative farms was pursued unrelentingly, despite voices in the Party which doubted the efficiency of such forceful measures and disapproved of them. The intimidation, beatings, and torture used to draft peasants into collective farms triggered protest and open rebellion across Romania. In the Banat, 'a region of comparatively large and prosperous farms', as contemporary American author Henry Roberts described it, the peasants put up fierce resistance, burning collective farms and devastating party offices. They allied themselves with 'partisan groups', which were still active in the mountains against the Communist regime. In the Banat mountains a number of resistance groups (some of them former military commanders, others Legionaries and sundry political refugees, mostly former members of the Liberal and Peasant Parties) opposed the Communist regime to the bitter end. The peasants protected them and provided them with food.[9] This as well as opposition to collectivization resulted in arrests and executions without trial, the confiscation of land and possessions of all those who opposed collectivization, now indiscriminately dubbed '*kulaks*', and deportation to hard labour on the Danube-Black Sea Canal, which started to be built in 1949 in south-eastern Romania.[10] The road not taken by the Romanian Communists in dealing with the agrarian question was the one that their Yugoslav comrades took instead: they opted for a gradual approach to collectivization. This and other non-aligned policies cost them, however, their friendship with Stalin and the Soviet hub.

The Banat and Tito's Split

In Yugoslavia the Communists had won the war almost single-hand-edly, with a little bit of help from the Soviets. Stalin's support had been a useful catalyst, but not a sine qua non condition for the final victory of Tito's partisans. No such situation existed in Romania, where the Communists came out of the woodwork only after the war, encour-aged by the Soviet presence. The independence and assertiveness of the Yugoslav Communists antagonized Moscow and led to an eventual split between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in 1948. Romanian Communists, by contrast, remained 'good old Stalinists' even after Stalinism itself had been repudiated in its mother country, the Soviet Union, in 1956.

The letter of June 1948 confirming the expulsion of the Yugoslav Communists from the Cominform stated their sin of independence as follows: 'Considerably overestimating the internal, national forces within Yugoslavia and their influence, the Yugoslav leaders think that they can maintain Yugoslavia's independence and build socialism with-out the support of the people's democracies, without the support of the Soviet Union. They think that the new Yugoslavia can do without the support of these revolutionary forces.'[11] The Soviets were sure Tito and the Communist Yugoslavs could not survive for long on their own outside the Communist bloc. One of the apocryphal anecdotes circu-lating about the Stalin-Tito split has Stalin bragging: 'I will shake my little finger and there will be no more Tito', which Khrushchev is said to have commented: 'Stalin could shake his little finger, or any other part of his anatomy he liked, but it made no difference to Tito'.[12] As it happened, Stalin was wrong and Khrushchev was right. Tito would not only survive the falling-out with Stalin, he would turn Yugoslavia into an alternative centre of power in the Communist bloc and be the first to anchor Communism into nationalism.

These high-politics wrangles reverberated to the grassroots level by setting in motion internal developments in Yugoslavia and Romania which affected the everyday life of ordinary citizens in the twin provinces of the Banat. Up until the Tito-Stalin split, the Yugoslav Communists had shied away from full-on collectivization for fear

of peasant rebellions. The peasants had borne the brunt of the war side-by-side with the Communists and were not likely to be easily cheated out of the rights they had fought so hard for. The split, however, acted as a catalyst for stepping up the process of collectivization in Yugoslavia. The political and economic pressure the Tito regime had come under after its complete isolation from the Communist bloc following 1948 rendered the Yugoslav authorities more ruthless and uncompromising in the implementation of their policies.[13] Paradoxically, while Yugoslavia was in Stalin's camp, they hummed and hawed and dragged their feet when it came to collectivization, blatantly disregarding Soviet 'recommendations' to the contrary. Once they were ousted from the Bloc, the Yugoslav Communists engaged in full-blown collectivization with a ruthlessness worthy of 1930s Stalinism: increasing pressure was applied on the peasants of Yugoslavia to join the collective farms and to sell their surplus crops to the state for fixed prices. This engendered similar reactions as across the border: just as in Romania, the peasants put up fierce resistance, ranging from hiding crops to burning them down altogether.

The Banat on either side of the border was one of the rich producers of grain and, as such, became central to the Communist planned economy. Starting from 1945 in Yugoslavia and from 1946 in Romania, the surplus of agricultural produce was requisitioned by the central authorities in order to feed the towns, in this respect also closely following the Soviet policies of the interwar period. The devastating drought of 1946 ravaged crops in Romania and Yugoslavia and brought the peasant population into a most destitute state. The President of the Yugoslav Economic Council seized this opportunity to justify the fixed-price sale policy: 'The drought partially or entirely wiped out the crops in Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina. We therefore must depend on last year's reserves and the harvest from Serbia and Vojvodina.'[14] In 1946 Romania saw massive population migration from north to south, that is, from impoverished Moldavia to the comparatively rich Banat and the south-western plains, in quest for grain and food. As one Gendarmerie report noted: 'hosts of people are streaming in from the drought-stricken regions, men, women and children, bringing with them articles of clothing and household items

to exchange for wheat and maize flour. Those who have nothing left to sell go the round of villages begging or looking for work in order to get some food.'[15] Such calamities served to drive home awareness of the huge regional economic disparities across the two countries. In both cases, the Banat was part of a comparatively well-off region, whose spoliation by the Communist authorities met with fierce opposition.

As in Romania Communist power depended to a great extent on Soviet support, the Party leaders Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Ana Pauker dissociated themselves from the Yugoslavs when the split with Stalin occurred and took special measures to ensure the sealing-off of the Romanian-Yugoslav border area. This coincided roughly with the frontier between the two halves of the Banat. All train and postal services between the two countries were as a consequence discontinued and mass deportations were ordered soon after. The targeted population in the Banat were for the most part Germans, some of whom had only just come back from their Soviet exile, and Serbs, who by virtue of their nationality now counted as unreliable elements. The 'Titoist heresy' gave the Romanian Communist authorities further occasion to purge their ranks as well as get rid of any social or political opponents. A Communist classification of the Banat deportees to the Bărăgan, the arid steppe land of south-eastern Romania, counted the following: '1,330 foreign citizens, 8,477 Bessarabians, 3,557 Macedonians, 2,344 persons who had collaborated with the German army during the war, 257 Germans, 1,054 "Titoists", 1,218 people with relatives who had fled abroad, 367 persons who had helped the "anti-Communist resistance", 731 "enemies of the socialist order", 19,034 kulaks and innkeepers, 162 former landowners and industrialists, and 341 convicted criminals.' The arbitrariness of the Communist classification puts one in mind of the absurdist logic of Borges's Chinese encyclopedia, where 'animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies.'[16]

The Crossroads of De-Stalinisation

The beginning of the 1950s saw the two Banat provinces drifting further apart in terms of economic and social policies handed down from the central authorities. In the Romanian Banat the curse of arbitrary deportations was in full spate, with secret police supervision that was to grow fiercer in the next years. The Yugoslav Banat, by contrast, was to enter a more 'liberal' era, with both peasants and the middle classes breathing more easily after the political repression of the late 1940s. This divergent development was due to the power dynamics in the Communist Bloc and to the wider international context of the Cold War.

In Romania any whiff of reform or independent movement in the Communist Bloc brought about a new wave of repression and purges. If the Titoist split had resulted in a political clampdown along the Romanian-Yugoslav border as well as in internal party purges, the death of Stalin in 1953 triggered a more complex set of defensive reactions among the Romanian Communists. Under cover of an apparent relaxation and opening, Gheorghiu-Dej seized the opportunity to get rid of his rivals and critics. Well aware that his power was predicated on the Stalinist model and practices and sensing potential threat after Stalin's death, Dej sought to consolidate his power.[17]

The outright denunciation of Stalin in Khrushchev's 'secret speech' of 1956 sent a shockwave throughout the Communist Bloc and engendered both centripetal and centrifugal reactions. Protests and mass demonstrations spread like wild fire in the GDR, Poland and Hungary. The Hungarian revolt of 1956 was put down by means of Soviet military force. By contrast, Romanian Communists were in the camp of those who closed ranks in the face of de-Stalinisation and happily lent their support to the repression of independent Communists in the Bloc. Tito and the Yugoslav Communists welcomed de-Stalinisation, as this meant the resumption of relations with the Soviet Union and the end of Yugoslavia's political isolation in the Communist Bloc. To everyone's surprise, Tito, the maverick Communist, did not however side with the reforming Hungarian Communists in 1956, terming their reforms 'decidedly anti-socialist' and Soviet military intervention necessary, 'if "chaos, a civil war, a counterrevolution and a new world war" were to be avoided'.[18]

In Romania, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 brought a new wave of persecutions, this time of the Hungarian minority. In the Banat, Timişoara was a hub of revolutionary ideas as both a university city and a cosmopolitan community. The Communist authorities clamped down on any manifestations of support and adhesion to the Hungarian Revolution, in particular among Hungarian intellectuals, and, for more efficiency, conjured up the spectre of Hungarian irredentism as a justification for their repressive measures. As Vladimir Tismaneanu points out, 'the main danger for Gheorghiu-Dej was, not a more unlikely Hungarian attempt to redraw the border with Romania by use of military force, but rather the contagious effect of the pluralistic experiment undertaken by the Budapest reformers.'[19] As a consequence, students and intellectuals who had supported the Hungarian Revolution were arrested and imprisoned.

While the Romanian Banat was thus fermenting with repression and repressed demands for political reform, across the border in the Yugoslav Banat things were taking a more relaxed turn. By 1952 the Yugoslav Communist authorities had to admit to the failure of forced collectivization and fixed-price sale policy and embark on a more liberal course. In this they were helped by the economic agreements concluded with the United States and Western European countries, which provided Yugoslavia with import grain and foodstuffs.[20] A decree of 1953 allowed the peasants to leave the cooperatives, an opportunity which they seized with both hands, so that by September 1953 of the million-and-a-half peasant households that had been collectivized, only 2,000 remained.[21] This never happened in Romania. Here collectivization, although partial and economically detrimental, stayed in effect until the fall of Communism.

Monolith vs. Devolution, or The 'Golden Age' of Communist Nationalism

In Romania and Yugoslavia the 1960s ushered in a period of Communism increasingly tinged with nationalism, though this was for completely opposite reasons. In Romania Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power following the death of Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965 and proceeded

to consolidate his monolithic rule on the Stalinist model. Even before becoming Secretary-General of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceauşescu had carefully spun his spider's web, taking over key positions and appointing his own supporters to strategic offices in the party and state. Stalin had done exactly the same in the 1930s. Success lay in the method and as such was guaranteed. What followed was a personalization of all structures of power and the creation of a personality cult worthy of the Soviet dictator. Under Ceauşescu, Romanian Communism swerved back on to the Stalinist track in an attempt to dissociate itself from de-Stalinised Moscow and to carve out an individual furrow for itself. Ceauşescu built his power on an alloy of nationalism and Stalinism, which for a long time proved inexpugnable. A repressive state apparatus based on the omnipresent Romanian secret services, the infamous *Securitate*, was used to silence opposition while a rediscovered Romanian nationalist discourse served to lend a veneer of legitimacy to the regime and enlist the support of some Romanian intellectuals. Moreover, Ceauşescu's maverick stance in relation to the Soviet Union and in particular his gutsy denunciation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 led Western countries to believe, at least for a while, that he was one of the 'good' Communists. The endurance of the Ceauşescu regime is also to be attributed to its heterogeneity in the sense that it had an initial phase of unprecedented openness and liberality, in the late 1960s, when it gained many adherents and many intellectuals either bought into the nationalist propaganda or still cherished the hope that Communism could change for the better. Stirner, the German protagonist of Richard Wagner's stories about Communist Romania in the Banat, falls into this category of enchanted and disenchanted citizens. His self-analysis showcases the dilemma of an entire generation, who learnt to live under the comparatively liberal Communist regime of the 1960s and who were then caught offside when the Party changed tack in the late 1970s:

> Stirner became party member when he was in highschool. The head teacher asked him if he wanted to become one and he said yes. After a couple of months he was ceremoniously given his party membership card. Stirner always said he had joined the

party in order to change something from within. He was not
the only one who had thought like that at the time. Many had
thought there was something that could still be done. He was
then no enemy of the regime. It was the regime who eventually
turned him into one. Times were different then, he would say
to younger people, it was a different country then. Stirner had
grown up in the years of liberalization. By the time he came of
age things were getting oppressive again. He had learnt some-
thing which was of no use to him anymore. He was useless and
he did not want to know it. And so began his life as an enemy of
the state, long before he himself became aware of it.[22]

During the self-styled Golden Age of Ceauşescu's regime, the
Romanian Banat got a taste of the policies from Bucharest aimed at
the 'social and national homogenization' of Romania: heavy indus-
trialization, close surveillance of the population, and, whenever the
opportunity arose, removal of minorities. All these factors conspired
to wipe off the map Ada Kaleh, a small Danube island overlooking
Orşova in southern Banat. The island, briefly mentioned in the early
chapters of this book, was fortified by the Habsburgs in the early
eighteenth century, then forfeited to the Ottomans, who colonized it
with Turkish population and changed its name from Neu Orsova to
Ada Kaleh, the 'fortress island'. In 1878, the Berlin Treaty assigned
it to Austria-Hungary together with Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the
Paris Peace Conference after the First World War hived it off into
the Romanian Banat. By the time the Communists came to power,
Ada Kaleh and its inhabitants had developed a self-sufficient way of
life based on tourism and commerce, the island retaining its Turkish
oriental character and capitalizing on its by now exotic appearance
and practices. Planted throughout with trees and shrubs, to protect it
from sweeping mid-stream winds, the small island was a picturesque
throwback to Ottoman times. There, the stacked-up layers of history
were in full sight like the geological strata of exposed sea rocks. For
lack of space, the small Turkish community had built their houses on
top of the ruins and galleries of the old Habsburg fortress, creating
a quaint, unintended metaphor of the passage of time and the waves

of history. The casual visitor walked onto the island as if into a picture postcard, with inhabitants still wearing their old-style Turkish dress and pampering tourists with oriental goodies: *lokum*, or Turkish delight, coffee traditionally brewed in a sand bath, rose-petal jam and fragrant cigarettes.

By the late sixties, Ceauşescu's modernization and industrialization juggernaut was in full spate, tearing down houses, villages, churches, to make way for industrial colossi and concrete tower blocks. Part of this modernization spate was justified (it was the Communists who electrified villages and sanitized insalubrious areas). Part of the destruction was, however, wholly gratuitous. Ada Kaleh, the small Danube island, stood in the way of a large-scale Romanian-Yugoslav joint project for a hydro-electric power station at the Iron Gates. As a consequence, it was scheduled for submersion in the late sixties and actually sunk in 1970. Its population was moved out, Islamic religious symbols were sent off to Turkey and some of the houses deemed most representative of the Oriental style were translocated to Şimian, a neighbouring island. The dislodged Turkish community refused to move on to the new island and scattered to the four winds: some went to live on the mainland in southern Banat, others joined relatives among the Muslim community of Dobrogea, on the Black Sea coast, others emigrated to Turkey. As Patrick Leigh Fermor put it, 'let us hope that the power generated by the dam has spread well-being on either bank and lit up Romanian and Yugoslav towns brighter than ever before because, in everything but economics, the damage is irreparable. Perhaps, with time and fading memories, people will forget the extent of their loss.'[23] Such instances of sacrificing traditional communities on the altar of modernity occurred across Europe as a whole. In Britain, for example, one of the last all-Welsh-speaking villages, Capel Celyn, was submerged in a similar fashion in 1956 to create a water reservoir for the industry of Liverpool. The Communist project at the Iron Gates sacrificed a historical gem of an island and in return built one of the major power stations in Europe and further regularized the course of the Danube.

No similar state intrusion occurred on the other bank of the Danube. Yugoslavia stayed under the deft rule of Tito until 1980 but,

by contrast, the federation would see the rise of nationalism by virtue of a system of devolution of power. Tito's authority was already confirmed and rooted in a strong basis of popular support so he could afford to engage in economic experiments, which in turn triggered political reform. In 1961 the Yugoslav market was thrown open to the world economy and two years later a new Constitution came into effect which strengthened the power of the constitutive republics and regional administration. The economic recession of the early sixties polarized the Yugoslav Federation into an advanced and comparatively prosperous north and a backward, impoverished south. As we shall see in the next chapter, the seventies and eighties exacerbated tendencies that were already emerging in the sixties and the end of Communism found the two countries, Romania and Yugoslavia, just like the two halves of the Banat, paradoxically heading for the same denouement although having started from very different premises.

CHAPTER 13

EXIT FROM COMMUNISM

The Rise of Milosević and the Fall of Ceauşescu

Economic Crisis

In the 1970s the basic coordinates of the post-war world were beginning to change for both Communist and non-Communist states. The oil crisis of 1973 hit the world economy hard and led to a rethinking of Soviet-American relations. The ensuing financial depression called the bluff of the welfare state and Keynesian principles of world economy. In the Communist Bloc, to the initial Titoist heresy was added, beginning with the 1960s, the Chinese denunciation of reformed Soviet Communism. The resulting Sino-Soviet split further polarized the Bloc, with latter-day Stalinist regimes such as those of Romania and Albania rallying around the newly-emerged Chinese pole. The military repression of the Prague Spring in 1968 buried the hope that Communism could ever be reformed and acquire a genuinely 'human face'. The Communist world was thus bent on a collision course with destiny and looked to either survive through some sort of reform or retain power through a change of regime. For the most part, the exit from European Communism in 1989 was peaceful and velvety. To everyone's surprise Communist regimes dissolved one by one as if they had never been. The only two Communist regimes that succumbed in blood were also the most dissimilar: Ceauşescu's repressive regime and

Tito's erstwhile successful Communist Yugoslavia. The present history of the Banat showcases the apparent paradox of the violent downfall of Communism in Romania and Yugoslavia and illustrates the sources of violence and the divergent fate of the same province within two different state systems.

1974 was a constitutional landmark in Yugoslavia. The new fundamental law introduced collective and rotating presidency in the Yugoslav Federation, strengthened the power of the constitutive republics and granted almost equal rights to Serbia's autonomous provinces, the rich Vojvodina and the poor Kosovo. By contrast, in Romania 1974 saw the conversion of Ceaușescu from Secretary-General of the Romanian Communist Party to full-fledged President of the Republic. The screw was tightening in Romania and loosening in Yugoslavia. In both cases, the developments represented survival strategies of the respective Communist regimes. Ceaușescu's rule became increasingly self-engrossed and familialized,[1] resembling more and more a medieval dynasty, with power concentrated exclusively in the hands of the Ceaușescu family. Tito's Yugoslavia became more decentralized in an attempt to prevent the concentration of power and safeguard the Communist 'ring to rule them all'[2] (i.e. the Presidency) by circulating it around the federation. The world financial crisis triggered further divergent reactions: while Tito continued to promote his consumerist policies to keep his people happy, Ceaușescu made the fateful decision to render Romania self-sufficient and debt-free overnight, at the expense of the population and his own popularity such as it was.

Thus, after 1974 one side of the Banat experienced the stringencies and austerity of the Ceaușescu regime, while the other basked in the comparative regional prosperity of Tito's Yugoslavia. In the eighties the Romanian Banat suffered chronic food shortages as did the rest of Romania, whereas its Yugoslav counterpart, snugly embedded in the prosperous and autonomous region of Vojvodina, knew no such dire poverty. Things were looking increasingly grim in Romania, whereas in Yugoslavia, nothing in the openness of the system and comparative economic prosperity seemed to presage the paroxysm of violence that would tear it apart in the early 1990s.

Money and Troublemakers, or the
Lucrative German Minority

In Romania one of the sources of dissent came from the scant German minority of the Banat. At the time German-language literature offered a vehicle of expression less policed than mainstream Romanian publications. As the *Schwaben* were a linguistic minority, the criticism that surfaced in their writings was not perceived as a contagious threat given the language barrier. Between 1972 and 1976 a group of young Marxist intellectuals got together under the name of *Aktionsgruppe Banat* (Banat Action Group) and used the comparatively slack censorship of foreign-language texts as well as their avowed Marxism to mount political and social criticism against the regime. Their critical stance and their exhortations for rethinking and reforming calcified socialism eventually made them unpopular with the authorities. The leader of the group, William Tottok, and other members were placed under secret police surveillance, arrested and interrogated. Writer Herta Müller, who had friends among the writers and students of *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, declined offers of collaboration with the Romanian *Securitate* and thus ended up in their black books. From 1985 her works were banned in Romania and she was subjected to increasing pressure and intimidation. She was interrogated and received death threats from the *Securitate*, which, while in themselves a form of psychological torture, were given an extra edge by the numerous cases of 'suicide' that conveniently removed critics of the regime.[3] Her literary works convey the obsessive fear and alienation of life under a repressive regime, the homelessness of being a second-class citizen and the compulsory gratitude one was supposed to feel for 'eating Romanian bread', as one of her interrogators kept repeating to her. In her novels and autobiographical essays, Herta Müller captures the lethal fascination with the possibility of fleeing abroad, which left so many dead and rotting in the fields along the border and in the waters of the Danube:

> The irresistible attraction of fleeing abroad, the possibility of another life, nebulous and fateful as it was, acquired concrete image whenever I travelled by train from Timişoara to

Bucharest. The train ran for a while flush along the bank of the Danube. For a while there was nothing more between it and the border. Everybody, big and small, even the uniformed soldiers and policemen went out into the corridor and looked out as if hypnotized, as if they looked into their own future. As if the indifferent river were a flowing, personally valid prophecy of the success of one's flight. No one moved anymore, it was as quiet as inside a church, while out there the broad rolling waters flowed and glistened along the narrower stretches, where one could easily have swum over. On the other side lay Yugoslavia, the transit country on the way to the West. You could see villages there, trees rustling in the breeze, as if waiting for you to come over. No one dared now look the others in the eye anymore, the skin tightened unnaturally and tingled as if burnt or frostbitten. [. . .] When the train pulled away from the Danube, everybody went back silently to their compartments and sat back down into their real lives.[4]

At the time of Ceauşescu's rule Romania's frontiers, very much like cell membranes in biology, evinced a special kind of selective permeability. While the majority of the population were denied visas to non-Communist countries and their freedom of movement was drastically curtailed, the same did not hold true of the state's non-Romanian minorities. Emigration of non-Romanian minorities was actively encouraged as it rid the Communist regime of undesirable, potentially dissenting elements, rendered the overall population more homogenously Romanian, which satisfied the nationalist discourse of the time, and, last but not least, brought money into the depleted coffers of the bankrupt Communist state. To use the words of Ion Mihai Pacepa, a high-ranking Romanian intelligence officer who fled to the United States in 1978 and the most senior intelligence officer ever to have defected from the Eastern Bloc, oil, Jews and Germans were Romania's most important export commodities at the time.[5]

As there was a rich and powerful state which was willing to literally redeem them, the German minority in the Banat (together with the Saxons of Transylvania) were thus throughout the seventies and

eighties a most lucrative source of income for the Romanian state. Between 1973 and 1977 around 7,200 Germans left Romania for West Germany every year. Initially 5,000 DM were paid for every emigrant, the sum rising to 7,800 DM by 1989.[6] West Germany was in this way practising a literal, business-like form of irredentism: it bought out political prisoners and dissenters from East Germany[7] and redeemed, in a pawnbroker's sense of the word, the German popu-lation of Eastern Europe. Huge sums of money were paid at both ends, both by the German government and by the German emigrants themselves. As pointed out by the writer Richard Wagner, a member of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* and himself a German emigrant from the Banat, the emigration process gave rise to 'a huge corrupt administra-tive apparatus in Romania' whereby 'the emigrants were despoiled of all their possessions by having to pay bribes, initially in Romanian currency and later increasingly in German Marks, which their rela-tives provided for them from West Germany. They paid bribes for the passports but also for every single receipt and paper, which had to be submitted with their application for emigration. An emigration bureaucracy came into being which squeezed the last penny out of the applicants. It possessed itself of houses, freezers, VCRs and whatever else the nomeklatura urgently needed for their convenience: coffee, whisky, Western cigarettes, Adidas shoes for their daughters. The staff at the passport offices often had shopping catalogues and showed the applicants what they wanted. In the last years there was hardly anyone who emigrated from Romania who had not paid for their passport. The sum ranged between 12,000 and 20,000 Marks per person.'[8]

Many of these sums were paid via intermediaries and in some cases these were conmen who cheated the applicants of all their money. The real intermediaries were, as Wagner stresses, collaborators of the *Securitate*. 'In Timişoara there was a man by the name of Caprariu. People called him the "gardener" or the "flower-man". His cover was a plant nursery in one of Timişoara's suburbs. He was arrested by the new authorities in January 1990 and by April he was free again. Some say he is back in business again.'[9] The business was so lucrative that some of the emigrated Germans took it up as well. Thus, 'long after she had emigrated to Germany, Frau Hedwig B. often came back to

her native village in the Banat and procured so-called "fast passports". For 20,000 DM you could get a passport in the shortest of time to visit Austria and because no visa was needed between Austria and West Germany one could cross the border into Germany. The woman was said to charge 2,000 DM for each passport as a mediating fee.'[10]

The paradox of the migrations of German population from the Banat to West Germany is that of national identification as a principle. The freshly-arrived immigrants had left behind them a country where they were viewed as a minority, as tolerated foreigners, only to meet with a similar story of discrimination in their new homeland. The Banat *Schwaben* were looked upon as Eastern Europeans; their dialect was different from those of Germany and they were perceived as aliens who threatened to steal the natives' jobs. Their Germanness changed valence with their change of country. All of a sudden they were not German enough or were sufficiently different to warrant an exclusion from the inclusive 'us'. The first to jar were the code of behaviour and the meaning of words. 'German is my native language', Herta Müller explains in one of her essays. 'From the very beginning I could understand every single word in Germany. All of them very well-known words and yet the meaning of many sentences was ambiguous. I could not appraise the situation, the intention behind the words.'[11] Richard Wagner's autobiographical character Stirner experienced the same feeling of being out of place following emigration: 'Stirner did not know how to behave. He did not know the etiquette of the place. He had the constant impression he was doing something wrong.'[12] As a writer, just as in the case of Herta Müller, it was the strange linguistic isolation that affected him most: 'He spoke the same language as the people here, but he spoke it as someone who comes from outside. His sentences were as if translated. He wrote but he had no target. He was alone with his language.'[13] Contrary to what nationalist discourses spout, waves of emigrations such as that of the *Schwaben* did not amount to a return to a long-lost fatherland. The *Schwaben* were more often than not forcefully dislocated into a foreign land. Their home, or *Heimat*, as it is called in German, remained back in the Banat. The fact that they spoke the same language as that of West Germany did not make them any less foreign in that country.

Constitutional Conundrum

While in the Romanian Banat the Communist authorities were making a good bargain of selling off their Jews and Germans and intimidating the remaining population via the secret police into submission, emigration or suicide, across the border in Yugoslavia things were silently brewing under the cover of unprecedented regional autonomy. Just like the rest of Yugoslavia, the population of the Serbian Banat benefited from the freedom of international travel and work, sent *Gastarbeiter* to West Germany and all over Europe and enjoyed Tito's consumerist policies while politically toeing the party line. After 1974 the Serbian Banat was part of an administratively emancipated Vojvodina, whose provincial parliament confirmed laws passed in the Republic of Serbia and whose courts of law were not subordinated to Serbian but directly to federal authorities. Kosovo, Serbia's other autonomous region, was similarly endowed with extra administrative powers. Whereas regional autonomy was in itself good, the legal framework within which this was achieved disadvantaged the Serbs and created justifiable discontent among Serbian republican elites. As Mihailo Crnobrnja stresses, 'a situation was thus created in which the provinces could block Serbia's passage of laws for the entire territory but Serbia could not block its own autonomous provinces on their territory, though they were nominally a part of the republic.'[14]

Together with Slovenia and Croatia, Vojvodina was one of the well-off regions of the federation and, as such, protective of its autonomy within Yugoslavia. In 1986 a memorandum from the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts complained that 'the political leadership of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina does not work for closer relationships and unity, but for ever greater independence and separation from the Socialist Republic of Serbia.'[15] Unlike Kosovo, where the majority of population was Albanian, in Vojvodina, which had undergone massive colonization and population reshuffling after the Second World War, the Serbs were the most numerous inhabitants. Here the conflict between regional elites and the Serbian Republic could not take on ethnic connotations. The only significant minority in Vojvodina were the Hungarians and these enjoyed the moral support of their

mother country as well as being integrated socially and economically in the fabric of the region. In Kosovo, however, the infringement of civil rights was attributed ethnic connotations by the Serbian elites, who by the late eighties were attempting to retain power by playing the nationalist card.

The Revolution Will Be Televised

From 1982 onwards food rationing was introduced in Romania and by 1989 'the official monthly ration of many Romanians had been reduced to a kilo (roughly two pounds) of flour, sugar and meat, half a kilo of margarine, and five eggs, with there being no guarantee that even these meagre supplies would be forthcoming.'[16] Huge queues reminiscent of wartime food shortages became a common sight during the later years of Romanian Communism and were the only type of spontaneous social assembly allowed by the tight censorship. Open dissent was scarce and the few such instances were effectively suppressed by the *Securitate*. Among ordinary people concern for everyday survival took precedence over political questions and informal networks developed which ensured that food was available on the black market, while privileges were enjoyed by the well-connected.

Of all the regimes of the Communist Bloc, Ceauşescu's was the only one that remained unreformed and unrepentant to the very end. The wind of change was already being felt in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, encouraged in particular by the coming to power of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and his policies of openness and non-intervention in other countries' internal affairs. Just as in 1956 the Communist government led by Gheorghiu Dej had resisted de-Stalinisation, so in the late eighties Ceauşescu stuck to his guns and refused to be swayed by the new developments. He pressed on with his disastrous economic strategy and, to make things worse, engaged in massive expenditure on megalomaniac projects while in various parts of the country hunger riots flared up, which were effectively suppressed and remained isolated due to a media blackout.

The Romanian revolution of 1989 started in the Banat. As a western border province, the Banat was surrounded by the more relaxed

Communist regimes of Yugoslavia and Hungary, it had a complex pattern of non-Romanian minorities, it was relatively far from the political centre (as Peter Siani-Davis put it, 'Timişoara is closer to Belgrade and Budapest, than it is to Bucharest'[17]) and was much more attuned to the developments that took place in autumn 1989 in the north-western part of the Communist Bloc (the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Polish strikes, the opening of the frontier in Hungary). Minor details such as the ability to receive Yugoslav, Hungarian or Austrian TV or radio broadcasts, due to geographical proximity, contributed to the informational emancipation of the province, at a time when the Romanian mass media was deluged with meaningless propaganda and national television broadcast had been reduced to two hours a day. 'With some effort', the Banat inhabitants 'retained their contact to the outer world. They had their heads full images of the other world, in which they did not live, and their discontent grew.'[18] Some still read the newspapers but they did so in between the lines. Many, as Richard Wagner put it, had stopped doing even that: newspaper subscriptions were effectively subscriptions to wrapping paper and, in the country-side, to toilet paper: 'in privies there hung newspaper pages torn into squares, on many of which were pictures of the President and his wife. Newspapers were full of them.'[19] The Banat was one of the prosperous provinces of Romania and as such felt more keenly the degradation of living standards in the late eighties. Miodrag Milin captured this paradox in perhaps the most apposite terms when he commented that 'the Romanian revolution did not break out where the misery was greatest but where the shame was strongest.'[20]

As Dennis Deletant put it, the 1989 events in Romania started as a Hungarian protest and became a Romanian revolt. It all began in Timişoara, the capital of the Banat, with an order of eviction against László Tőkés, a young maverick priest of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Tőkés, who had already been evicted from Braşov and transferred to Timişoara, had got into trouble due to his outspokenness regarding Hungarian minority rights as well as his critical stance on the issue of systematization, the Communist project of bulldozing villages and turning them into agro-towns. News of his troubles reached Hungary and Western Europe in connection with Ceauşescu's

demolition policy, which antagonized the West and stripped the Romanian leader of his illusory international fame as a 'good' Communist. The eviction of Tőkés from his church flat in Timişoara by the supine church authorities promised to be nothing more than a repeat of his eviction from Braşov. This and the fact that by that time Tőkés had attracted some international attention may account for the initial sluggish response of the Romanian authorities to the crowd of parishioners who had gathered to protest against their pastor's eviction. The show of solidarity brought Hungarian parishioners out into the streets, who were then joined by Romanians, some genuine protesters, others onlookers who were sucked into the maelstrom of the gathering crowds by sheer curiosity. As the reaction of the authorities seesawed between concession and coercion, but was on the whole indecisive, the protests were thus allowed to snowball into increasingly assertive and aggressive mass demonstrations. The slogans and initial agenda quickly shifted and took on an anti-governmental edge. Protesters vandalised shops and the central headquarters of the Communist Party in the centre of Timişoara.

The escalating protests in Timişoara exposed two major cracks in the Romanian Communist system. One stemmed from the monolithic concentration of power into the hands of Ceauşescu and his close family circle, which meant that initiative for vital, swift action in times of crisis was affected by a crippling dependence on orders from the centre, that is, from Ceauşescu himself. As these orders happened to be very vague in the case of the Timişoara protests, the local authorities wavered initially, which allowed the demonstrations to get out of control and thus break the panoptic circle of silence and rumour as the officials could no longer paper over and hush up the by now blatant and contagious evidence of revolt and discontent.

The second major flaw revealed by the protests was that of self-delusion. Ceauşescu had been relying for such a long time on propaganda and repression that the combination of the two made him oblivious to his loss of popularity: he only saw what his propaganda apparatus lavishly showed him and any manifestations of dissent were promptly nipped in the bud and discarded as the work of foreign espionage or inimical elements within the state. The genuine popular support he

had enlisted by his 1968 stance against the Warsaw Treaty invasion of Czechoslovakia had been worn threadbare by 1989. This overestimation of his actual popularity led Ceauşescu to belittle the importance of the street protests in Timişoara and interpret them instead as the work of Hungarian irredentism or Western spies seeking to destabilize Romania.

The shock of a minor protest escalating into mass demonstrations was reflected by the switch from water cannons to regular cannons in the authorities' attempt to restore order. On Ceauşescu's orders, the army was sent in to punish the rebellious city. Military repression gave the revolution-in-the-making its iconic image of martyrdom for freedom: scores of protesters were killed on the steps of the Orthodox Cathedral and elsewhere in the centre of Timişoara. Stories circulated of how some of the wounded were executed in hospitals: minor wounds in the neck or the hip were 'cured' with a bullet in the head. Some of the bodies were shipped over to Bucharest and incinerated or mutilated beyond recognition in the hope of obliterating all evidence of both rebellion and bloody repression. Others were buried locally in mass graves. Families who managed to find their dead relatives hid the bodies and declared a natural cause of death, such as a heart attack instead of a bullet in the heart.[21]

The Timişoara the journalist Christopher Hitchens visited shortly after Christmas 1989 gave the lie to any bookish expectations of Romantic revolutionary grandeur and exaltation:

> everything changed as we approached Timişoara. There were fewer people on the roads, and they seemed less keen and animated. As we found the outlying bits of the town, we noticed that our salutes were not returned. All the window-glass in the city seemed to have gone. Except for some flags with the now famous hole cut in the centre (a borrowing from Budapest in 1956), there were no signs of anything except shell-shocked, sullen wretchedness. I felt almost cheated. Here was the town of resistance, of the revolutionary epicentre; the town that had lived up to 1848 – and won this time. Where were the garlands, the proud slogans, the maidens in national dress, the gnarled old

men with fierce tears in their eyes? How could I have been so romantic and vulgar? Timişoara was not the scene of a triumph but of an atrocity – a sort of distillate of twentieth-century horrors. The inhabitants had been strafed from the air like the people of Guernica. They had been shot down in heaps like the victims of Babi Yar, and buried like refuse in mass graves in the forest on the pattern of Katyn. Many had been raped and mutilated like the villagers of My Lai. Before he left on a state visit to, of all places, Iran, Ceauşescu had given explicit orders that the city be punished. This was his Lidice; his Ouradour. At least the people who had been through such a digest and synopsis of horror could tell themselves that they were the last carnage of the last European dictator. But this obviously was not much of a consolation on the day after.[22]

Although the 1989 Romanian revolution was mainly urban in character, its disturbances did trickle down to the villages and rural communities, where they took on a local, personalized form. Here news of the breakdown of the old order created an atmosphere of impunity which lent itself to payback and personal vendettas. As Richard Wagner, German writer and member of *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, reminisces, in his native village in the Banat

they chucked out the mayoress and her deputy; the second deputy took over the official duties, till a week later they chucked him out too. They sacked the mayoress's husband who ran the cooperative society, the manager of the corn-mill, the director of the hat factory. The people dragged out the chief of the local police – or militia, as the Communists called it, consisting of three men whose main occupation was harassing and beating people and getting bribed by would-be emigrants – and gave him a thrashing. Since then he has slipped away to his home town, four villages away. The second militia-man is in prison for brutal assaults. The third is still in office under the new public order authority, now called the 'Police' again like before the War.[23]

The revolution became national reality when a motley group of writers, intellectuals, actors and erstwhile Communists managed to persuade the director of the national TV station in Bucharest to allow them to send a live message to the nation. After decades of strictly-censored TV programmes, which, in the last years of the regime, had been reduced to a stultifying two-hour daily broadcast, after decades of carefully crafted and filtered news and information, of party propaganda churning out the same hollow, self-aggrandizing discourse, which had long lost touch with reality, nothing less than a revolution was being broadcast live: the drowsy TV screen was all of a sudden flooded by strange faces, men young and old, dressed in casual clothes, bringing in news on the course of events, launching appeals to the people, speaking on behalf of various groups and authorities, sending criss-crossing messages to the army, to the inhabitants of this or that district, asking for support, warning against shootings and *Securitate* snipers, deluging a transfixed Romanian audience with helter-skelter news, suggestions, initiatives. The impact of this night-and-day broadcast was huge. The veil of silence was torn and war was declared on the oppressive dictatorship. From that point on there was no going back. All the taboos of the regime came down crashing at once: prayers and songs of liberation and mourning were broadcast; unedited footage of the victims of violence in Timişoara, including mass graves and mutilated naked corpses, were obsessively shown on TV; the sycophantic propaganda surrounding the Ceauşescu couple was in one fell swoop replaced by visceral denunciations and pent-up hatred: 'The Dictator has fled! Don't let him get away! We have won! Liberty! Victory! Down with Communism!'

The odds swung in favour of the rebellious population with the helicopter flight of the Ceauşescus on 22 December 1989, after they were heckled and forced to withdraw during a derailed popular rally in Bucharest, and the fateful decision of the army command to throw their weight behind the protesters. A so-called National Salvation Front was hastily thrown together in the heat of the revolution, the most prominent members being second-rank Communists. In the confusion of the political upheaval and anarchy of those December days one's past counted for less than one's avowed

hatred of the regime and one's political acumen. Testimonies from high up in the military hierarchy show that people were reluctant to put all their eggs in one basket and instead hedged their bets so that, irrespective of the outcome of the revolution, they could easily present evidence of either loyalty to the Communist leadership or of revolutionary activity. Ceauşescu and his wife were eventually captured after the helicopter pilot made an emergency landing on the pretext of a technical malfunction. The Communist regime in Romania came to an end very much as it began: with a show trial and execution. The Ceauşescus were the last ones to be sentenced to death according to the old Communist legislation. The simulacrum of a trial, organized by people who had been part of Ceauşescu's following, heaped the entire blame of the regime on him and his wife, thus symbolically and demonstratively purging the country of its evil 'geniuses'. The execution was filmed and broadcast for maximum effect and the grotesque image of the dead Ceauşescus went the round of first the foreign and then the Romanian press to join the other unedited snapshots of violent death that punctuated the revolution. No terrorist was ever caught or prosecuted and, to this day, a host of whodunnit questions have remained unanswered.

The Rise of Milosević

Starting with 1990 things calmed down in the Romanian Banat as the first semblance of democratic, constitutional rule slowly came into being in Romania for the first time since World War II. Families mourned their dead while a new breed of reinvented politicians stepped into the limelight, strutting and fretting their hour. At the same time, clouds of war were gathering over the other, Yugoslav half of the Banat, which was soon to be the witness of full-blown civil war. Once the hostilities got under way, the autonomous province of Vojvodina was one of the few regions of Yugoslavia that remained peaceful, outside the vortex of internecine violence. This had much to do with the power game going on within the Yugoslav Communist leadership as well as with the region's ethnic make-up and the international configuration in place at the time.

Situated at the other end of the Communist political spectrum, Yugoslavia, unlike Romania, had attempted throughout the Tito era to steer clear of nationalism and to suppress all ethnic-driven and particularist movements. While Ceauşescu's regime came to be vitally dependent for its apparent legitimacy and discourse on reinvented Romanian nationalism, Tito's Yugoslavia was basking in the glow of a supranational identity, which managed to keep its many peoples together in a way that nationalist discourses would never have been able to. This scheme of things endured for several more years after the death of Tito in 1980, but eventually came to a violent end when some of the conservative Yugoslav Communist elites broke ranks and chose the path of nationalism as a solution to their waning power, attaching ethnic connotations to essentially social problems.

By 1986 a combination of constitutional malaise, which strained Serbia's relationship with its autonomous provinces, genuine local discontent, perceived threat and manipulation of ethnic fears had contributed to the creation of an explosive situation in Kosovo, Serbia's poorest province. Kosovo was at the time inhabited by a majority of Albanian population (roughly 75 per cent) and a marginalized Serbian minority. The province was traditionally viewed by Serbian elites as the cradle of the Serbian nation, primarily because it had been home to the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchy ever since the Middle Ages. Regional discontent which could have been solved by moderate, democratic negotiations escalated out of all control as it was sucked into the power struggle between embattled conservative elites, whose political interests were tightly bound to the one-party Communist state, and progressive, reformist forces in the party, who sought to open up Yugoslavia to Europe and its political and economic models.

Once the conservative forces found themselves a leader in the person of Slobodan Milosević, they proceeded to monopolize the federal vote by attempts at purging the Communist leadership of Serbia initially, and then of the other republics. In the autonomous Vojvodina, just as in the Republic of Montenegro, the Communist leadership was overthrown more easily given that the majority of the population were Serbian, which made the organization of mass rallies and mob manipulation more effective.[24] In Kosovo, however, where the

Albanian Communist leader Azem Vllasi enjoyed the support of the masses, his removal from the party sparked off movements of protest on the part of the Albanian population. These too played into the hands of the Serbian conservatives as Albanian unrest in Kosovo was then paraded as an argument for using the Yugoslav army to 'pacify' the province. By 1989, using good old Stalinist purging methods, Serbia had managed to get hold of four of the eight votes within the federal parliament.

The attempts of Milosević and his supporters to gain a monopoly of power in the Yugoslav Federation were couched in a scaremongering nationalist discourse, portraying the Serbian nation under siege, ousted from its own country and in fatal danger of being wiped out by ethnic foes, such as the Albanians and later the Croats. V.P. Gagnon Jr. provides one of the most sobering and persuasive arguments of how the power game of the Yugoslav elites, locked as they were in a tug-of-war between conservative and modernizing tendencies, was purposefully translated into ethnic conflict terms. As he points out, 'conflict did not erupt on its own in these ethnically mixed regions. There was no spontaneous resurgence of submerged or repressed "ethnic hatreds", but rather a purposeful and active creation and exploitation of such hatred as a means of stopping or slowing shifts in the locus and structure of power in Serbia.'[25] This instrumentalization thesis about the Yugoslav conflict is borne out when comparing the relative peacefulness of the equally ethnically diverse Vojvodina throughout the conflicts of the early 1990s with the unprecedented violence of Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

CHAPTER 14

WAR AND DEMOCRACY: THE BANAT AFTER 1989

Since the Second World War the history of the splintered Banat has been like the two faces of ancient Greek theatre: one laughing and one crying. When rule was more relaxed and humane on one side of the border, it was usually draconic and forbidding on the other. During the war, the Jews were spared in the Romanian Banat, while they were deported and exterminated in the other half of the province. Under Communism the Romanian Banat experienced the full-blown panopticon effect and economic debacle of a totalitarian regime, whereas the Yugoslav Banat enjoyed the most open and prosperous of Communist regimes in the Socialist Bloc. After 1989 the fall of Communism inverted the roles once more, so that the Romanian Banat came to know an openness and freedom it had not enjoyed for more than half a century, while its Yugoslav counterpart was placed under siege and came to bear the economic brunt of Serbian warfare, the subsequent UN embargo and NATO bombing campaign. This is the last chapter in the story of the Banat, which sees the province through the throes of post-Communist change, looks at its role as an exchange ground between the authorities in Bucharest and Belgrade and ponders over its resurrection, or rather reinvention, within the framework of the EU as part of a cross-national Euroregion.

Vojvodina during the Yugoslav Wars

While Vojvodina and, within it, the Serbian Banat were by no means
the centre of attention in the Yugoslav wars, they played an import-
ant, if less visible, role in the orchestration of the conflict. Looking
at this part of former Yugoslavia helps one frame an answer to the
question: why was there violent conflict in some parts of the feder-
ation whereas other regions remained relatively peaceful? It was in
Vojvodina that the first party purges took place during Milosević's
rise to power. In 1988 he organized mass rallies against the Vojvodina
Communist leadership, who stood accused of corruption and lack of
cooperation in the effort to relieve the Kosovo Serbs. Under pres-
sure of these mass rallies, the Vojvodina leadership resigned and
were promptly replaced with Milosević's cronies. This was a strategic
move whereby Milosević sought to isolate the Communist Albanian
leadership in Kosovo.[1] During the wars proper, Milosević's unified
Serbia drew on Vojvodina's economic resources and secured a degree
of self-sufficiency that came in handy during the embargo years.
Vojvodina, moreover, functioned as a haven for Serbian refugees from
the war zones, which, coupled with the flight of some of the autoch-
thonous population, led to a massive reshuffling of the province's
ethnic configuration. By the end of the Yugoslav wars, Vojvodina
was exposed as the place where two of the most wanted war crimi-
nals took refuge from international justice. Ratko Mladić, former
Bosnian Serb military commander, was arrested on 26 May 2011
in the Serbian Banat. Mladić was accused of genocide and crimes
against humanity, and most infamously of being the moral author of
the massacre of Srebrenica. He had been hiding in Lazarevo, a village
which prior to World War II had been inhabited by *Schwaben* and
known as Lazarfeld, then the Yugoslav Communists colonized it with
mostly Bosnian Serbs, and in the wake of the Bosnian war (1993–
1995) became a retreat for Serbian war veterans.[2] Goran Hadžić,
former President of the self-proclaimed Serbian Republic of Krajina
(in Croatia), who just like Mladić stood accused of crimes against
humanity, was similarly captured on 20 July 2011 in Krušedol, a
Serbian village in Vojvodina.[3]

Relations between Bucharest and Belgrade

While Croatia was casting around at the beginning of the Yugoslav wars for weapons and military reinforcements and was forced eventually to fall back on smuggling, the Serbs had no such concerns as they were in control of the sizeable and well-equipped Yugoslav army. With the imposition of the UN economic embargo in 1992, the Serbs continued to fare well militarily but had to find alternative fuel resources to keep their war machine going. Even with the secession of two of the richest republics of the Yugoslav Federation, Slovenia and Croatia, the rump Yugoslavia under Milosević was still economically self-sufficient, being in possession of Vojvodina, a rich agricultural producer which could cover domestic food needs. In addition, Serbia itself, as Marko Hajdinjak has shown, was one of the two republics of the former Yugoslav Federation that exported energy (the other was Slovenia) and 'as such had enough energy to "survive" a few years of sanctions'. What it could not produce itself, and urgently needed for the war effort, was oil. This had to be imported or, as the sanctions made this impossible, smuggled in.[4]

The Banat was one of several fuel-smuggling routes into Yugoslavia. The new post-1989 political leadership in Bucharest – most of them refurbished Communists – provided the Milosević regime with both moral and material support while officially proclaiming themselves neutral in the conflict. A number of commonalities brought the Iliescu regime in Bucharest and the Milosević regime in Belgrade closer together. Both were led by former Communist leaders, who had known each other for quite a while and saw eye-to-eye, both their regimes had reinvented themselves as would-be democracies while retaining a strong monopoly on political power, and, not least, the two regimes shared the common concern of dealing with minorities clamouring for autonomy. As Marius Oprea has shown, 'smuggling was performed in 1995 by the Romanian authorities with the help of the secret services and a number of private companies controlled by former *Securitate* officers.'[5] Electoral campaigns being times when secrets are aired and skeletons come out of the cupboard, the smuggling became public knowledge during the 2000 Romanian presidential campaign.

Emil Constantinescu, the incumbent President, tried to prevent the re-election of his rival Ion Iliescu and secure his own renewed victory, despite the country's poor economic performance during his mandate, by accusing the latter of breach of UN regulations during the Bosnian war: 'Tens of thousands of tonnes of fuel were transported to Yugoslavia, as well as train carriages full of arms [. . .] The revelations of the past year show that grave acts of smuggling in 1994–1995 were known and co-ordinated by the highest authorities in the land.'[6]

The Hungarian Minority of Vojvodina

As war was raging in seceding Croatia, there was genuine concern regarding a possible extension of the conflict to Vojvodina, where the sizeable Hungarian minority feared that they might be next on Milosević's ethnic cleansing list. Waves of Hungarian refugees (50,000 by the end of 1991) heading from Slavonia to southern Hungary took aback the Budapest authorities, who struggled to provide shelter for them. This was taking place at the same time as towns such as Vukovar in eastern Croatia were being ravaged under heavy siege by the Yugoslav army and massacres dismembered mixed communities elsewhere in Croatia. In this context, being afraid that the remaining ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina might be used as hostages by the Serbian authorities, 'the Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall announced on 21 October 1991 that one of the main planks of Hungarian foreign policy would be to protect their co-nationals in Yugoslavia.'[7]

In his 1994 book *Central Europe since 1945* – written during the second major war of Yugoslav succession, the Bosnian war of 1992–1995 – Paul G. Lewis envisaged this public stance of the Hungarian authorities as potentially conducive to a highly explosive situation: 'The responsibility felt by the Budapest government for the treatment of Hungarians in Romania has already been a source of considerable tension, while the position of the Hungarians in Serbia's Vojvodina could become the source of more dangerous conflict if the political and military gaze of Belgrade shifts from the other conflicts surrounding the republic's borders.'[8] But Belgrade's political and military gaze did not shift to Vojvodina. And this was despite the fact

that one of the most vocal anti-war political movements was based there, despite the ethnic mix of the province and its equally harrowing memories of atrocities committed during World War II (the Novi Sad massacres and the subsequent Titoist reprisals). The explanation for this inevitably lies in multiple factors and may be key to understanding the sources of escalating violence in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. By comparison with poverty-stricken Kosovo, Vojvodina's high standard of living occasioned no comparable social tensions which could then be superimposed onto ethnic divisions and thus exploited by the Belgrade leadership. The ethnic proportion of Serbs to non-Serbs was, unlike in Kosovo, clearly in favour of the former. In addition, Hungary's firm official stance and commitment to protect all Hungarians outside its borders acted as a deterrent on the Belgrade war party, if indeed they hatched any plans regarding the Hungarians of Vojvodina. Milosević could get away with claiming that 'pacifying' Kosovo was an internal problem of the Serbian state, which, given international principles of state sovereignty, meant that there were no grounds for foreign intervention. Thus Belgrade stopped short of antagonizing any minorities that had strong international backing. However, if the Hungarian state were to get involved in the conflict, that would have turned the whole affair into an international, instead of a domestic, conflict.

The Yugoslav internecine conflict did eventually spill over and become an international war when NATO and the UN took it upon themselves to intervene in the Bosnian war, which broke out in 1992 as a continuation of the hostilities which had accompanied Croatia's secession from Yugoslavia in 1991. The leadership of the ethnically mixed province of Bosnia-Herzegovina tried to steer clear of the war raging outside its borders and to maintain the relative harmony between its peoples: Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Muslims. Bosnia's declaration of independence in 1991 divided its peoples: the Bosnian Serbs, backed by the Serbian-controlled Yugoslav Army, proclaimed their own republic in Bosnia, *Republika Srpska*, and the Bosnian Croats, backed by the authorities of independent Croatia, sought to establish their own territory within the province. The massacres perpetrated by the Serbian army in Bosnia triggered NATO military intervention in

1995, with air raids targeting *Republika Srpska*. It took international military action to put a stop to the carnage in Bosnia, just as four years later the civil war in Kosovo would only be brought to an end by another round of NATO bombings, this time in Serbia proper.

The 1999 NATO bombing campaign against Serbia showed the two-edged character of Budapest's protective stance regarding the Hungarians in Vojvodina. Unlike the Albanians of Kosovo, who had almost no support from an internationally feeble Albania, the Hungarians of Vojvodina enjoyed the moral support of Hungary, whose membership in NATO made it a valuable ally. However, NATO's plans of bombing Serbia into desisting from its ethnic-cleansing campaign in rebellious Kosovo rendered the situation of Vojvodina Hungarians precarious. The prospect of Hungary, as a recent NATO ally (Hungary had joined the Alliance 'just days before the bombing began'[9]), getting involved in the bombing campaign sent a wave of apprehension among Vojvodina's Hungarian population. As Josef Kasa, mayor of Subotica and leader of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, pointed out, Hungary's involvement in NATO's military action was likely to upset the delicate ethnic balance in Serbia's hitherto peaceful province and sour relations between Serbs and Hungarians. Kasa went to Budapest to urge the Hungarian authorities to stay out of the conflict, should NATO decide to go through with their plans. Back in Vojvodina, Kasa gave public assurance of the solidarity of Vojvodina Hungarians with the Serbs and condemned the planned NATO bombings.[10] Hungarian political activity in Vojvodina was kept at a low ebb for the duration of the campaign so as not to pour gas onto an already explosive situation.[11] During the air-raid campaign between April and June 1999 which targeted bridges across the Danube, isolated incidents were recorded in Novi Sad, the capital of Vojvodina, where Hungarians were 'thrown out of the bunkers where they sought shelter during the bombing. [. . .] "There is no place for you in the shelters, since the bombs are coming from your country."'[12] Such incidents did not escalate and remained mere isolated reminders of how animosity and inter-ethnic friction could be whipped up in times of crisis even in the most peaceful of communities.

Beyond the Nation-State: EU and the
Rebirth of Regionalism

By the end of the twentieth century one half of the Banat joined the
EU as part of Romania, the other half remained outside as part of a
newly autonomous Vojvodina in a chastened Serbian state, which is
still knocking at the gates of the EU. Since the fall of Communism,
in Romania's case, and after the fall of Milosević, in Serbia's, a new
academic and social discourse has taken off: the multi- and inter-cul-
turality of the Banat and Vojvodina, respectively, as a cultural asset,
a historical model of inter-ethnic tolerance to be cherished, preserved
and followed. Both halves of the Banat are extolled as unique places of
cultural diversity, which are now no longer threatened by encroaching
nation-states, but rather by demographic depletion and emigration.[13]
The emigration of the once prosperous *Schwaben* is deplored on both
sides of the border and local attempts are made to maintain the sparse
German community and their religion for as long as it is possible.[14]
While Romania's entry into the EU has so far changed little at a local
level in the Banat, the fact that Serbia remained outside the loop of
integration has had considerable impact on Vojvodina's demographic
evolution, with many young people emigrating to EU countries. The
Hungarian minority of Vojvodina resumed its political struggle after
the end of the Yugoslav wars, walking the tightrope between mod-
erate demands for more autonomy and radical tendencies towards
separatism.

Although the nation-state is still going strong as a political and
administrative unit in south-eastern Europe, decades of warfare and
the unresolved conundrum of economic disparities between regions
of the same state as well as the controversial balance of minority vs.
majority rights have shown the inherent limitations of this model. In
search of the best of all possible worlds, new formulas are being pro-
posed, not as complete alternatives to the nation-state, but rather as
parallel developments which might mitigate its shortcomings. After
having witnessed the dire consequences of taking the nation-state
ideology to its very extreme, the Serbian state under a new, demo-
cratic leadership has had to consider the alternative of regionalization

in the case of its only remaining autonomous region, Vojvodina. A 2007 sociological study on multiculturality and regionalization in Serbia and Vojvodina sought to go beyond the knee-jerk reaction which automatically associates the demand for regional autonomy with secessionist tendencies and to look into the advantages and dis-advantages of the new formula for administrative reorganization. One of the important theoretical points made in the introduction to the study refers to the uses to which regionalization (that is, devolution of political and administrative power from the centre to the regions) can be put. Regionalization can mean going back to a form of feudal atomisation, to hived-off enclaves, or it can be used as a means to ren-der the existing state more efficient. The difference between the two directions is given by the actual process of devolution of power: who gets the power at a regional level once it is handed down? Who ben-efits from regionalization and who are the likely losers? Following the logic of 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions', the authors of the study draw attention to the potential misuse of regionalization as a bid by local elites to share in what is essentially authoritarian power. Decentralization can, if misused, mean a lowering of authori-tarian rule from the central to the local/regional level, in other words, an empowering of local elites, while the ordinary population remains disenfranchised.[15]

In history there is no such thing as coming full circle. Even when old structures and solutions are revived, it is always done with a dif-ference. The old Banat of Temesvár cannot be unified as it once was, nor is there any will to do so, but the new overarching EU framework and the aforesaid limitations of nation-states make it necessary that regional solutions be sought and applied that would solve problems common to border regions. This has amounted to a rebirth of region-alism and a flurry of cross-border regions. The ethos of the European Union, notably the Interregionality Community Initiative of the early 1990s, encourages and provides substantial financial support for regional collaboration and the setting up of cross-border organizations. Although these predate the EU legal framework, they have been given a particular incentive by the massive financial involvement of the EU in this respect.[16]

In 1997 a Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa (DKMT) Euroregion came into being across the triple border dividing Hungary, Serbia and Romania. This includes the historical territory of the old Banat alongside a wider fringe covering the other two provinces of Vojvodina (Bačka and Syrmia), several counties in southern Hungary and one in southern Transylvania. Going further back in time, the new region can be roughly mapped onto the Ottoman *Eyalet* of Temesvár, though not in its entirety, or loosely onto part of the possessions of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom. The region is, by contrast to its predecessors, not the result of wars, conquests or peace treaties, but rather a cross-border community of economic, cultural and infrastructural interests. It is an optional commonwealth (one of the Hungarian counties that joined it in 1997 eventually withdrew in 2005), working on joint projects and benefiting from European regional funding. As the geography and climate of the region is fairly similar and homogeneous, the problems encountered (such as flooding, given the region's position along the Danube valley at the confluence of several rivers, or industrial river contamination) and the remedies needed are similar too. These as well as cultural exchanges and common historical experiences typical of borderlands are in themselves valid reasons for cooperation, although sociologists point out that the steady flow of EU subsidies may well be the greatest of incentives behind such Euroregions.[17]

The DKMT Euroregion is still in its infancy (by comparison with regions such as the Meuse-Rhein and Rhein-Waal Euroregions, which are more than 30 years old) and only time will tell how effectively it can contribute to the prosperity of the region thus demarcated. As it stands, it both complements state administration and collaborates with it. What the respective states cannot do because of lack of resources or political will or both, this Euroregion strives to achieve: funding local projects, developing infrastructure, attending to local problems that would otherwise be put on the back burner if succour were sought from the centre. At the same time, the region depends for its functionality on the cooperation of the national governments to overcome problems such as visas between EU and non-EU territories. More importantly still, the Euroregion also provides an alternative for problematic regionalization in the case of territories falling outside EU

borders (Vojvodina) or belonging to states that are still strongly cen-
tralized, despite EU membership, such as Romania. A broad literature
on regionalization and the impact of the EU on the administrative
reorganization of member and accession countries points out that dev-
olution of power occurs as a complex process of negotiation between
EU conditionality (the conditions EU imposes on states aspiring to
membership) and political actors of various states, and that divergent
outcomes are obtained depending on 'domestic political considerations
and historical experiences and legacies'.[18] In Romania, for instance,
there are regional structures in place but devoid of financial powers and
legal status. As Bischoff and Giosan have shown, these regions have no
policy-making power, no financial infrastructure and no involvement
in delivery of services.[19] One can therefore see the attraction of a cross-
border Euroregion for Romanian county authorities, who would thus
get access to considerable EU funding as well as become additionally
empowered through representation in EU institutions, in particular
the Association of European Border Regions.

Another important point which has been made about regionaliza-
tion and the opposition it encounters at a national level regards eth-
nic politics. In states where there are demands for ethnic autonomy,
the reluctance of central authorities to proceed with regionalization is
greater, it being perceived as dangerous to national unity. This is the
case with both Romania and Serbia, where claims for regional auton-
omy have been associated with ethnic autonomy and triggered seces-
sionist fears. These fears stem from the possibility, in both theory and
practice, that administrative structures could be hijacked for political
purposes. A useful term of comparison is Slovakia, where regionaliza-
tion was applied but done across ethnic boundaries, splitting into two
the ethnic Hungarian community in southern Slovakia and provoking
protests from its leaders.[20] Underlying this conundrum are the follow-
ing questions: are economic prosperity and administrative efficiency
dependent on ethnicity? Wouldn't regionalization along ethnic lines
mean that the exclusivist national homogeneity principle of the centre
was merely replicated at a regional level? Does an ethnic community
have to administratively shut itself off from others in order to survive?
The answer to any of these questions is not an easy one especially

when so many conflicting interests, overt and covert, are at stake. A cross-border region such as the DKMT Euroregion potentially holds the best solution to this conundrum in that it sidesteps ethnic issues and foregrounds economic and cultural cooperation, overcoming to a certain extent the artificial fragmentation of borders. It moreover stabilizes border regions as it defuses the potential for economically-motivated secession by investing in local projects and boosting the regional economy. This is all the more relevant in Central and Eastern Europe, where most secessionist movements (though by no means all) had their roots in regional economic disparities (see, for instance, the frequent pattern of comparatively well-off regions seeking self-governance and then full independence – as in the case of Croatia and Slovenia in Yugoslavia).

CHAPTER 15

CONCLUSIONS

How do provinces come into being? More often than not they are a function of power: state power, economic power, international powers. Piecing together bits of territory and girding them inside a common border is an act of taking possession, of defining jurisdiction. Boundaries endure as long as the power structures that spawned them and are refashioned and renamed when a new configuration obtains. The same territory can go through history under different names, just as the same name can be attached to different territories. The history of the Banat of Temesvár showcases the paradoxical discontinuities underlying the apparent unity and continuity of a province at any given point in time.

The Banat started as a defensive border alongside similar structures across the southern reaches of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom. Bans held office and territory from Croatia and Bosnia all the way to the southern Carpathians. Just as the Romans had done before them, the medieval peoples of the region used natural features such as mountains and rivers as borders to their realms, so that the sundry banates fencing off southern Hungary followed the course of the Sava, Drava and Danube rivers and the tip of the Carpathian Mountains tapering off into the Balkan Peninsula. Over the territory between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers and western Carpathians the Ban of Szörény and the ispáns of the Temes and Arad counties held sway. It was not a time for nation-states. The

very idea of a state was itself a fluid notion and had little to do with ethnic groups and more with the power of magnates to lay claim to territories and amass properties. Borders ebbed and flowed in tidal waves of conquest and reconquest.

The mid-sixteenth century wave of Ottoman conquest swept aside the masters of the Danubian valleys and carved up the former Hungarian territories into new administrative units to serve the purposes of the new potentates. The *Eyalet* of Temesvár amalgamated the counties of Temes and Arad and the western parts of the Banate of Szörény, leaving out its mountainous eastern reaches, which continued to be run by Bans outside the loop of Ottoman rule for another century to come. The Ottomans were thus bringing together under the same jurisdiction territories which had been separate and not part of the same administrative unit since Roman times. Just like the previous masters, they administered their Christian province by proxy, putting to good use the traditional hierarchy of local power. *Knezes* ran the village world and liaised with the new lords, the *Sipahis* or the Sultan's cavalry, while the only centres of Ottoman culture and administrative power remained the fortress towns.

With the Habsburg reconquest of Hungarian territories late in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman world of the *Eyalet* vanished as if it had never been, few traces of Muslim culture remaining even in the fortified towns from where the province had been run. A new province was carved up by the Habsburgs between the Tisza, Maros and Danube rivers and the Western Carpathians, which did not entirely coincide with the *Eyalet* nor with the medieval Banate of Szörény. The Banat of Temesvár was a cross between the two – it took its name from the latter and its territory from the former – and its final shape and government were decided by the terms of conquest. As the Habsburgs treated their latest conquests as *neoacquista*, or newly acquired territory, they wiped the slate clean of all previous property rights and land claims and possessed themselves *jure belli*, by right of sword, of the war-ravaged Banat of Temesvár. Unhampered by intractable local estates, the imperial authorities proceeded to turn their new province to account: several waves of colonization brought in skilled farmers from all over the Holy Roman Empire, industries were founded, towns

consolidated and the southern ramparts of the province militarized against the Ottoman menace.

The Habsburg colonizations added Germans, Frenchmen, Italians and Czechs to the province's ethnic kaleidoscope, which had been shaken up by one conquest after another, by war-time repression, by flood and famine. Rather than being a depopulated province, the Banat of Temesvár was a place of elusive peoples prone to fleeing from advancing armies as well as traditionally mobile due to their mostly pastoral lifestyle. The motley peoples of the Banat were neatly grouped into communities of privileges, according to their usefulness to the imperials: the colonists became free peasants and enjoyed tax dispensations, the Serbian Orthodox Church was the holder of the so-called Illyrian Privileges, to which the Romanians were also affiliated owing to their shared Greek Orthodox faith; others such as the Jews and the Greek merchants were merely tolerated; while the itinerant Roma eluded the grasp of imperial authorities and led their shadowy existence in the margins of society. From the end of the eighteenth century the manorial system was reintroduced in the civilian part of the Banat as this was retroceded by the Habsburgs to the Hungarian estates. Until 1867 the heartland of the Banat would be run from Budapest while its south-eastern militarized frontier continued to be ruled directly from Vienna, enjoying privileges which were outside the reach of the civilian population.

The Revolution of 1848–49 called the bluff of idealistic clamouring for freedom, unity of nation and liberal values. In the Banat of Temesvár, just as in the rest of Hungary, the revolutionaries' high-minded ideals refracted through a multi-ethnic prism into conflicting claims and irreconcilable visions. The tug-of-war between Vienna and Budapest split the nationalities of the Banat into two camps, both of them fighting in the name of the same monarch. The monarch, once restored to his full powers, rewarded loyalty and treason in much the same way, with renewed absolutist rule.

When the Monarchy split into two in 1867, the Banat was placed entirely in the Hungarian half and its Military Border melded into civilian administration. The new era of constitutionalism raised hopes for genuine political representation and dashed them in equal

measure. Fledgling parliamentarianism grafted onto a manorial, patriarchal social system, with power concentrated in the hands of the landed gentry, was not long to show its disempowering and alienating effects in Hungary as in other countries of Europe at the same time (Spain and Greece being two prominent examples). In addition, forced Magyarization and political chicanery worked towards preventing genuine consensus and identification with the state among the non-Hungarian nationalities. The Great War dealt a Damoclean blow to the political stalemate of Hungarian parliamentarianism and, there being no allegiance to glue the state together, the nationalities gravitated towards the new post-war nation-states.

The Banat shared in the fate of Austria-Hungary and waxed fissiparous amidst the bickering of the Paris Peace Conference, splitting into shards of territory which went to the Yugoslav Kingdom, Romania and even a tiny part to Hungary. On the eve of its bicentennial as a Habsburg imperial province, the Banat was thus dismantled to make way for centralized states struggling to integrate territories and minorities into a new administrative and political formula. The Romanian Banat and the Yugoslav Banat parted ways as if they had never belonged together, population was exchanged across the freshly drawn border, old ties were severed and new ones were painstakingly forged. From then on, according to the splinter of the province in which they happened to live, Banat people would partake in the trials and tribulations, prosperity or misery of either of the two states, Romania and Yugoslavia.

During the Second World War the border drawn 20 years previously came to spell the difference between life and death, toleration and deportation. Communism temporarily introduced a commonality of fate in the two halves of the Banat until the Stalin-Tito split embarked Yugoslavia, and with it the Yugoslav Banat, on a maverick course of independent Communism. By contrast, the Romanian Banat continued, alongside the rest of Romania, to plough the furrow of Stalinism even after Stalin himself had been repudiated throughout the Communist bloc. The fall of Communism found on the two sides of the Banat border the most dissimilar of Communist regimes: the Yugoslav one, ostensibly open and relaxed, but under the calm surface

seething with unresolved social and ethnic issues, and the Romanian one, draconic and unrepentant, drawing its power from panoptic fear and informational blackout. The spark of the 1989 Romanian Revolution was ignited in the Banat, which all of a sudden turned from a sleepy backwater into a flagship of anti-Communist rebellion. The forgotten periphery was revealed to be at the epicentre of the seism that shook up Communism in East-Central Europe and wiped it out in a matter of months. The other half of the Banat was not the centre of a revolution and, by contrast, remained a peaceful haven in the midst of the Yugoslav wars, thus giving the lie to the myth of ancient ethnic hatreds commonly used to explain the outburst of violence in early-nineties Yugoslavia.

With the removal of authoritarian regimes from both Romania and the former Yugoslavia a new academic discourse came into being stressing the multiculturality of the Banat and Vojvodina, presenting the complex ethnic configuration of the region as an asset, a model of peaceful cohabitation and tolerance. Such a perspective is in keeping with academic tendencies throughout Europe with their emphasis on acknowledging and cherishing difference and diversity. The irony, however, is that such a discourse has taken off now that the region itself is becoming more and more ethnically homogenous. While the actual ethnic and cultural diversity was at its peak (in the interwar and post-war period), it was perceived as more of a problem than an asset. Now that the national borders are finally coming into their own and ethnic homogenization takes place naturally, without being imposed by the state, the newly-discovered multiculturality of the place comes across as an exercise in nostalgia, in 'where are the snows of yesteryear'. The *Schwaben* are all but gone from both halves of the Banat and the other minorities have dwindled considerably through emigration, flight, economic migration or, simply, assimilation.

The appearance of the supranational power structure of the European Union has given a new lease on life to regions and regionalism. Cross-border regions, being highly vulnerable to economic problems due to their peripheral position within nation-states and as such predisposed to secessionism, have formed the target of EU policies of stabilization and economic rehabilitation. It is in this context

that the Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa (DKMT) Euroregion was created, unwittingly resuscitating the old province of the Banat of Temesvár, this time embedded in a loose functional framework of interregional cooperation. The Euroregion is not a province in itself nor is it meant to be. The very idea behind it is that of making existing borders more flexible and porous, rather than drawing new ones. The old Banat of Temesvár was carved into being by wars and peace treaties and disappeared off the map in much the same way. With each redrawing of frontiers, old ways of life were disrupted and new ones came into being. Hopefully the new regionalism will replace the time-honoured concept of borders as lines that separate and exclude with a more flexible, interactive one born of local needs and elective affinities.

NOTES

Chapter 2   Medieval Bans and Banates

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dont l'une essentiellement médiévale et l'autre plus proche de l'acceptation moderne. La première se rapporte [...] à un groupe séparé de la masse de la population par certains privilèges. C'était une conception juridique.' Hitchins, *L'idée de nation chez les roumains de Transylvanie (1691–1849)*, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, 1987, p. 51.

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